



Wireless media revolution



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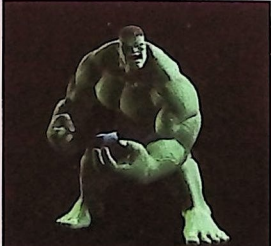
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Test Lab: Wireless desktop combos



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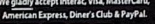


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**In selected regions ... and online**

Not all stories run in all regions due to space constraints. Check our online archives for the full index of stories across all regions at www.hubcanada.com

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- Wireless media revolution: Streaming your PC content to your TV
- Online diaries: Best of the blogging portals
- HUB's picks for killing time online
- Hit the Road with ... your home phone?





The Internet has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, the way we do business, the way we entertain ourselves and,

among other things, the way we research and access information.

The Wild West days of the Net are, at least to a degree, behind us. The American Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) has seen to that, for us in the Great White North too.

Last month, we asked you how much you've come to rely on the Internet. The answer was, in essence and not altogether surprisingly, "a lot."

From students whose entire campus is wireless-enabled where lecture notes are shared between peers via email and professors push files onto student's laptops via the class network, to recent immigrants keeping in touch with family and friends back home via email, instant messaging and Skype.

From new parents sharing videos and pictures of the latest addition to the family via email, a dedicated photo sharing service or on a family Web site, to retirees keeping in touch, following hobbies or researching family histories online.

It's hard to imagine the days before the Internet made its insidious creep into our everyday lives: From the

early days when augmenting a company title with a dot-com suffix would be a sure fire way to get some investment capital to now, when a downed Internet connection in the office is a terminal prognosis for productivity that day, it's clear that for good or ill, our reliance on the Internet – for work, play, communication, research and much more – is almost total. It is around the HUB offices, and, judging by the dozens of letters we received this month, for HUB readers too.

Enjoy the issue,
Andrew Moore-Crispin
Editor-in-Chief

Last month, we asked how reliant you are on the Internet.

Patrick Chan writes: As a university student, I would say that I'm heavily reliant on the Internet. Whether it be purchasing textbooks from online vendors, communicating with classmates, paying for tuition, or even doing research for assignments and projects, I have found the Internet to be an integral part of my education. However, I'm reminded of a point that was brought up in a lecture (regarding the need to reference information). While the Internet's convenience and accessibility are indeed valuable, being heavily reliant on the Internet for information without ensuring the credibility and accuracy of the information can be detrimental to not only students but general users as well.

For his letter, Guy wins a JVC 256MB XA-MP2 Digital Audio Player.

Congratulations Guy.

This month, in addition to general feedback on the issue, we're asking for your thoughts on our question of the month: Do you prefer using a laptop or desktop computer? Whatever your opinion, we want to hear from you. Send your thoughts to: letters@publishing.ca.

The letter chosen as Letter of the Month will win a copy of McAfee's Internet Security Suite 2005 (ver. 7.0) for protection from malicious sites and email, viruses, pop-up ads, auto-install programs, identity theft, and hacking attempts. With a full suite of online security software and 24-7 live tech support, Internet Security Suite 2005 is a comprehensive package for protecting your PC online.



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Letter of the Month

Our Letter of the Month comes from Guy A. Costanzo who writes:

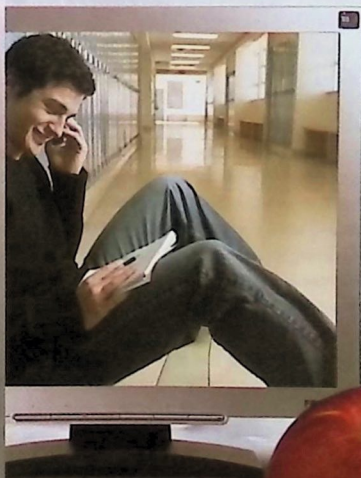
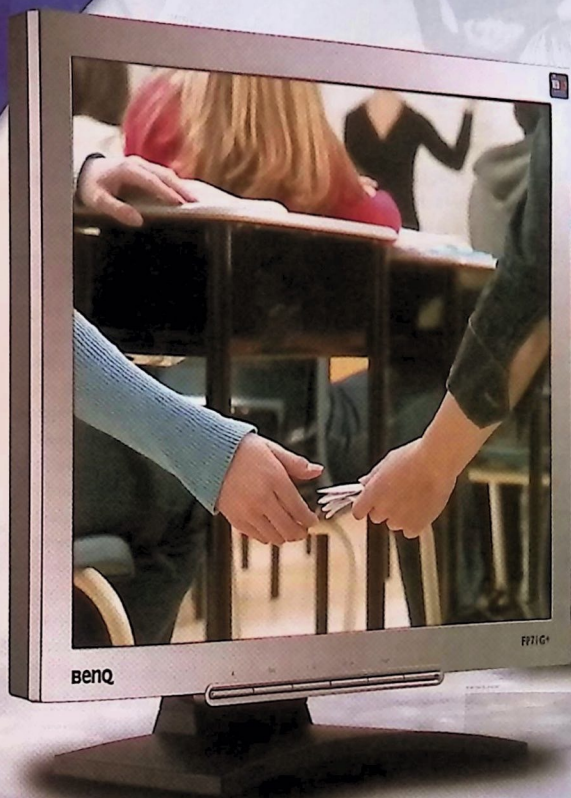
My introduction to computing came in 1966 at UBC in Computer Science 100/101. A lot has changed since then.

My working career spanned over 33 years as a researcher in the area of public health – all of that time using computers. The introduction of Internet access transformed my working day.

Now that I am retired, I spend a lot of time on my hobbies that include amateur radio and music. I can communicate with other hams all over the world using voice-over-Internet software called Echolink. I can try to communicate with the astronauts aboard the International Space Station by tracking their orbital position in real time via the Internet. I can get sheet music, listen to almost any piece of music I can think of, and learn to play almost any instrument via the Internet. I am constantly learning new things from participating in the various newsgroups on the Internet. Access to the Internet has enriched my life in so many ways that I can no longer live without it.

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Test Lab: Wireless desktop solutions

Cordless Keyboard & Mouse Combo with Microban Protection

If you've ever seen a feature story on the evening news detailing just how disgusting the average office area is, you may be tempted by Fellowes' anti-bacterial come on. While the HUB electron microscope is currently in the shop for repairs (always happens when you need it the most, it seems), Fellowes assures us that Microban protection disrupts the normal functioning of micro-organisms, making it impossible for them to grow or reproduce. It's incorporated during the manufacturing process, and as such, won't wash or wear away.

The anti-microbial protection afforded by the Fellowes solution is the key bullet point. As a wireless keyboard and mouse combo, the set is otherwise unremarkable.

The keyboard element is good with a nice feel to the keys – not too hard, not too soft – and a fairly quiet key strike. Customizable and simply-labelled function buttons on the top of the board take care of several Internet and email functions while three left-mounted buttons look after the most common word processing commands – cut, copy, paste. A simple oval button array looks after media functions like volume, play, pause and skip. It works natively with Windows Media Player, but requires training for other media applications.

The mouse portion of this particular combo is a major stumbling block. It's not ugly per se, but it's far from the most attractive thing to grace the desktop. While it's wireless and optical, it's still decidedly old-school, and not in that chic, retro way either. The scroll wheel works, but offers no benefit over other wheels, and when compared with Microsoft's recent innovations in hardware with scroll wheels, it doesn't fare very well. It's essentially an oval lump to control the cursor on-screen and nothing else – no useful extra buttons to be found here.

DiNovo Wireless Desktop

Users looking to escape a laptop-style keyboard might be advised to look elsewhere; the "Zero Degree Tilt" key design of the DiNovo desktop is very similar to a laptop board. That said, the desktop is designed to be modular with the smaller-than-average optical mouse. The wireless receiver can be used as just a USB dongle or kept on the desktop in a stylish one-port USB hub, and the number pad with media control



button array is separate from the keyboard (with the same media control array) itself. The idea seems to be that mobile professionals can carry the number pad and mouse with them on the road, leaving the keyboard at home. As very few laptops include a number pad – Dell only recently announced number pads on some of its widescreen notebooks – this could prove a boon for mobile professionals.

Desktop users looking for a sleek and stylish wireless desktop solution are well served by Logitech's latest. While the key design and travel takes some getting used to after using a regular format keyboard, it does work well.

The software that ships with the DiNovo integrates well with Windows, finding the default mail application (Thunderbird in our test case) and media player (Windows Media Player 10) then mapping these to the appropriate function buttons on the left and right of the keyboard.

The smaller than usual format may not be comfortable for all users; it's clear that the DiNovo was designed with portability in mind – whether of all or just some of the components. The mouse is diminutive next to a regular mouse and the keyboard is similar to a full-size laptop board.

The modular number pad incorporates a digital display to give a read on the time and ambient temperature or, by pressing one of two context buttons, can be used as a calculator, sans computer.

The DiNovo is also available in a Bluetooth version with a rechargeable, full-sized mouse for an extra \$100 or so. We tested the RF version.

Wireless Optical Desktop Elite

As keyboards and mice go, Microsoft's hardware arguably leads the pack. While even its Mac-compatible keyboard / mouse combos currently refuse to incorporate any Apple-specific keys, users might be

Info Box

Fellowes Keyboard & Mouse www.fellowes.com **Estimated price:** \$79.99
Keyboard size: 405x243x27 mm (15.9x9.6x1.1 in)
OS compatibility: Windows XP/2K, ME, 98/95, XP
Ergonomics: Popular key layout
Function buttons: Top- and side-mounted; internet, email, word processing and common applications (copy, paste)
Battery type: Four AAAA, not included
Media control: Top centre media control wheel for common functions
Mouse: 3-button optical w/ scroll wheel button
Receiver connection (wired): USB **Wireless technology:** RF

Pros: Anti-microbial protection
 Quiet key travel
 Compact and attractive

Cons: Not terribly striking
 Mouse ugly

Info Box

Logitech DiNovo www.logitech.com **Estimated price:** \$109
Keyboard size: 405x243x27 mm (15.9x9.6x1.1 in)
OS compatibility: Windows XP/2K, XP
Ergonomics: Zero-degree key layout
Function buttons: Volume, power, play and stop + media controls
Battery type: Two AAA, included
Media control: Keyboard and detachable standardised standard media control device
Mouse: Small compact 3-button mouse + scroll wheel button
Receiver connection (wired): USB **Wireless technology:** RF or tested

Pros: Sleek and attractive
 Compact design
 Detachable wireless mouse

Cons: Limited travel key
 No buttons to monitor and maintain
 Unpleasant



willing to forgive upon using the desktop.

The actual keyboard leaves a little to be desired; it merges seamlessly with Windows as one would expect, but the keys are overly loud.

A side-mounted version of Microsoft's excellent vertical and horizontal scrolling wheel makes up for this somewhat, as does a row of favourites keys, keyboard shortcuts for common applications, and an extended battery life.

Microsoft offers a wide variety of keyboard and mouse combos, from the straight-ahead version as tested here to ergonomic split-key and semi-split boards.

The mouse element is where the Elite really shines. The same click-less vertical and horizontal scroll wheel is wrapped in a very comfortable and ergonomic design. The wheel scrolls easily and rocks left and right to allow for horizontal scrolling in documents and web pages. The mouse can also function on just one AA battery when replacements aren't nearby.

Two side-mounted customizable buttons are default mapped to Internet browser forward and back functions and actually add to the web browsing experience.

PilotBoard Wireless Desktop

Kensington's keyboard / mouse combo is unremarkable save for the stylish, semi-transparent receiver puck that would look at home on a Mac desktop sporting an AirPort. Said receiver can connect via USB or PS2 ports.

The keyboard is functional with a nice, soft feel to the keys, which are

well-spaced. This makes for a fairly quiet keyboard with all alpha keys within easy reach.

Users can press a function lock button to alter the way F keys are used. Upon locking the function keys, they fulfill other common Office and email functions such as copy, paste, reply and forward. The barebones software that ships with the keyboard and mouse combo offers the option to lock the F-keys to their primary or secondary functions on boot; while the F-lock function appears on other keyboards tested, the option to choose how the keys function by default is unique to the PilotBoard.

A series of buttons launch common applications and look after



functions like putting the computer into sleep mode. However, the impressionistic icons that label said buttons are open for much interpretation and require some thinking about before pressing.

A media control button array looks after the standard media player functions and a rotating wheel in the centre of the keyboard allows for easy adjustment of the volume level. The volume control knob feels sharp to the touch however and offers up too much resistance to be used with one finger.

The mouse that ships with the PilotBoard combo is unremarkable. Rubber ribbing on the side of the mouse is comfortable to use and the left and right click buttons function as they should. The scroll wheel is of the clicking variety and functions as a third, user-definable button.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

* Keyboard measurements taken with detachable wrist rests where applicable. Measurements given [WxLxD].



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Info Box

Microsoft Desktop Elite www.microsoft.com/hardware Estimated price: \$199

Keyboard size*: 450x265x23 mm (19.6x10.5x1 inches)

OS compatibility: Windows 2000, XP, Mac OS X 10.1+

Ergonomics: Full travel, standard layout keys, padded wrist rest

Function buttons: Common Windows applications launch and Internet short cuts

Battery type: Four AAAs, included

Media control: Top-mounted media control array for common functions

Mouse: 4-button optical with clickless left mouse wheel + button

Receiver connection (wired): USB, PS2 Wireless technology: RF

Pros:

Clickless scroll wheel technology
Seamless Windows integration
Good customisation software suite

Cons:

Keyboard feels sticky
Also competitive only on Mac against iKeys

Info Box

Kensington PilotBoard www.kensington.com Estimated price: \$79

Keyboard size*: 450x265x19 mm (19.25x10.5x0.75 inches)

OS compatibility: Windows 2000, Mac OS X 10.1+ (with Kensington-specific software)

Ergonomics: Detachable wrist rest, standard key layout

Function buttons: Common Windows applications launch + function buttons, scroll wheel with Internet back + forward buttons

Battery type: Four AAAs, included

Media control: Top-mounted media control array with volume control knob

Mouse: 2-button optical with scroll wheel + button

Receiver connection (wired): USB, PS2 Wireless technology: RF

Pros:

Scroll wheel
Detachable receiver module
Adjustable wristrest

Cons:

Requires labelling on function keys
Volume control knob has click
Mouse buttons not customizable

Sid Meier's Pirates!

Publisher: 2K Games **Developer:** Firaxis **Platform:** Xbox

Sid Meier's pioneering 1987 action-adventure-strategy game *Pirates!* got a graphics, sound and gameplay overhaul earlier in the year for PC, and now comes to the Xbox with some console-specific new features.

Set in the 17th century Caribbean, you control a fledgling pirate out to make his mark in the world. How you choose to do that depends entirely on how you want to play the game.

Whether your goal is to seek revenge on the Spanish nobleman who wronged your family, become the most notorious pirate in history, or retire a wealthy trader and treasure hunter, the open-ended nature of the game makes it possible to tailor your experience accordingly.

The bustling seas of the Caribbean are rife with opportunity for an enterprising young privateer. Merchant and treasure ships sail the trade routes between budding colonies, ripe for plundering. Colonial powers (English, French, Dutch and Spanish) war with each other for control of the area, and willingly enlist the help of privateers to harass their enemies.

Gameplay is a mix of strategy (navigating the

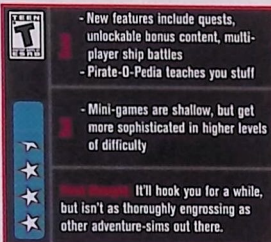
open-ended sea maps, docking at ports to buy and sell loot, stopping to gossip at the local tavern, and wooing the governor's daughter), action (engaging in sea battles or boarding enemy vessels to dual one-on-one with the enemy captain), and adventure (seeking out treasure based on arcane pirate maps, laying siege to towns in turn-based battles or sneaking around town in a stealth mode.)

For those who might find the open-endedness a bit overwhelming, one of the new features is a quest mode that lays out a set of concrete goals to follow. The Xbox version also differs in that there's less sailing time between ports, wind doesn't have as strong an effect on movement, and sneaking around town is in third person perspective.

While it's easy to sink hours and hours into exploring everything *Pirates!* has to offer, the repetitive nature of the mini-games and limited

number of scripted events (such as the sword fights) quickly start to wear thin. While the overhaul is welcome, *Pirates!* doesn't stand up as well as Sid Meier's classic empire-building simulation, *Civilization*.

By Erin Bell



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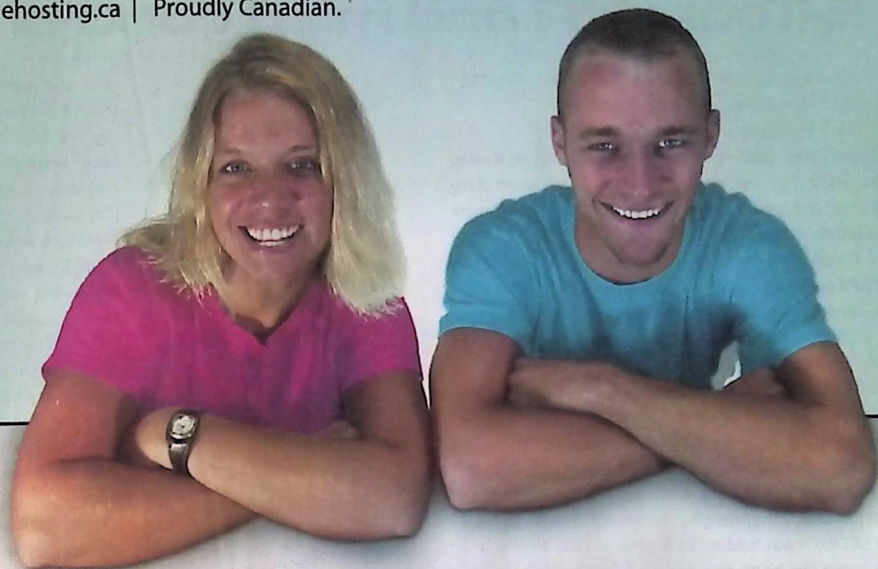


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E-Tech: VR and mind control

"Hi," said the diminutive figure in front of me. "What's your name?"

"My name's Emru," I answered.

"Emru, huh? That's a nice name."

I was impressed. I was speaking to an animatronic robot on a noisy exhibition floor, and it [he?] had managed to pluck my name out of my spoken sentence and pronounce it correctly – something most humans have trouble doing.

Of course, I should have expected the extraordinary. I was at the annual SIGGRAPH conference, which is usually thought of as the place to be for the latest and greatest in computer animation and special effects. But aside from focusing on the current state of the art, SIGGRAPH also keeps its eyes on what's around the corner. Its Emerging Technologies ("E-Tech" for short) component is partly theoretical – it features 17 hours of panel discussions – but also has a practical side that's pretty amazing. Imagine a science museum that doesn't describe what is or what was, but what could be – and encourages you to get your hands [as well as eyes, ears, mouth and feet] on everything. It's not just seeing the future, but experiencing it.

This year's SIGGRAPH was held in Los Angeles in early August, and I managed to spend two hours exploring the E-Tech displays. Interest was high – despite repeated visits, this talking robot, part of a Carnegie Mellon University project called the Interbots Initiative, was the first I had a chance to interact with.



Our man-machine conversation was short, but amusing; I've been playing with basic artificial-intelligence programs since I was a kid [I'm sure other computing old-timers remember Eliza fondly], and I was having fun feeling out where the canned scripts came into play. After the robot directed me to talk to one of the people working the booth, we said our goodbyes. As I turned to walk away, I muttered to a spectator, "That was cute."

Suddenly, from over my shoulder, the robot: "I heard that!"

Okay, that was impressive. Other displays weren't as chatty, but certainly inter-

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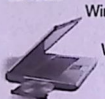
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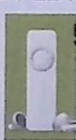
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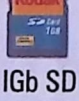
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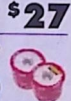
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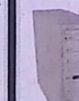
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esting. Remember all the hype over virtual reality (VR) in the early nineties? Nintendo Power Gloves, clunky helmets, The Lawnmower Man? Although the craze died after a few years, VR is still alive and well. Virtual Hang Gliding Over Rio de Janeiro, out of Universidade de São Paulo, provides one such example: a participant climbs into a suspended harness, dons stereoscopic goggles [much more comfortable than the skull-crushing helmets of old], and experiences exactly what the title implies – along with the help of a trio of fans, simulating air currents.

Just a few feet away was a Japanese project, the Virtual Canoe. And they really mean virtual: not only was the water and scenery virtual [projected on screens above and below the user], so was the canoe! The only real object was the paddle, which used haptics [force feedback] to provide the

sensation of slicing through water currents.

One exhibit I saw but didn't try was right out of the movies. Remember how Tom Cruise scrolled, dragged and dropped on a projection screen in Minority Report? The Virtual Veejaying display did exactly the same thing, but also allowed for video mixing, distortion, and "video scratching" – not so much for Cruise's type of police work, but for real-time party effects. It's good to know that among other things, the future will be funky.

The last thing I experienced was the tongue-twistingly named Shaking the World: Galvanic Vestibular Stimulation as a Novel Sensation Interface, from NTT's Communication Science Laboratories in Japan. Easily the most talked-about E-Tech display at the conference, it was also the one that featured a constant queue – I didn't get a chance to try it until the

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closing minutes of the exhibition. (I was part of the second-to-last pair to give it a shot). Electrodes were placed behind our ears, and we were asked to walk in a straight line. The demonstrator would then "steer" us with his little control panel, which

signalled the electrodes to upset our balance just enough to make us stumble left or right. At one point as I found myself uncontrollably listing

to starboard, I thought about how an outgrowth of this technology could someday be used as part of a physiotherapy regimen, maybe to help people regain their sense of balance. Then I heard another wag's prediction: "Mind control."

Like all future technologies, I suppose it could go either way. I guess I'll just have to make sure I'm on the right end of the control panel.

By Emru Townsend

Emru Townsend (emru@pobox.com) sometimes finds the future dark, but still feels he's gotta wear shades. You can read more about this year's Emerging Technologies at www.siggraph.org/s2005/main.php?f=conference&p=etech.

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BenQ DV3750

Expanding its display line, BenQ Canada recently introduced its DV3750, a 37-inch widescreen home theatre LCD display.

With an eight millisecond response time (the time it takes to switch all the screen's pixels from all black to all white or vice versa), BenQ says viewers are afforded a smoother viewing experience with out ghosting, streaking or still image retention.

The company's own Senseye image processing technology purges noise from the image and enhances or restores truer colours, providing greater image detail by enhancing picture contrast and depth.

A Direction Correlational Deinterlacing (DCDI) chipset analyzes and opti-

mizes images pixel by pixel for smoother and more natural moving images without the jagged edges or artifacts that can sometimes plague

LCD displays.

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Photoshop CS2: Powerful and pricey

Photoshop has been part of Adobe's stable since 1988 and for most of its history the target audience for this image editor has been the graphic artist. Digital photography created a second type of user, and potentially a much larger market. Not surprisingly, then, the last two revisions of Photoshop, CS and CS2, have included a few significant features designed with photographers in mind.

As your image collection grows, using an image organizer is a lot more efficient than using just the file browser, and CS2 includes a useful organizer called Adobe Bridge. Many photographers have discovered some useful benefits of saving images in a Raw format, and Adobe has taken a lead in raw format handling in a couple of ways. Adobe Bridge and the camera raw converter supports virtually all of the raw formats developed by the various manufacturers. Adobe has also attempted to unify this file format by creating an open-specification raw format called DNG.

As a camera reviewer, my needs are somewhat unusual in that I have raw image files that I want to keep, taken with most manufacturers' cameras. Bridge handles them all as easily as if they were TIFFs or JPEGs. Bridge also seems to be robust enough to keep track of several thousand high-resolution images without choking.

I keep an inexpensive 24-85 mm zoom lens on my camera most of the time, and while it's a fine lens, the barrel distortion at the wide angle end is quite noticeable. When I first used the Optical Lens Correction filter in CS2, I was amazed. One simple slider adjustment and the distortion was fixed. The lens correction palette also has tools to correct problems such as lens vignetting, perspective correction and chromatic aberration. This tool has made my desire to get a new lens seem less pressing.

One other tool, actually from Photoshop CS, that I use a lot is the shadow-highlight adjustment tool. The highlight slider works on the tones higher than RGB128 only, while the shadow slider works on those below RGB128. It's a great tool to expose a bit more detail in the shadows without losing the highlights.

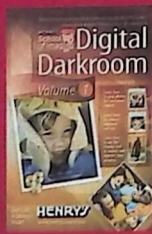
Between the release of CS and CS2, Adobe also introduced Photoshop Elements 3, a much less expensive package that had

A multimedia approach to learning Elements 3

Digital Darkroom, Volume 1 (three CD set)

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For photographers living in southern Ontario, Henry's is an institution. Henry's has also run a successful school of photography (now called school of imaging) for a number of years, and out of that school comes a helpful CD tutorial called Digital Darkroom, Volume 1 (Volume 2 should be available by the time you read this). This volume contains three CDs with over two hours of video instruction on 18 aspects of Photoshop Elements 3, from understanding the interface to advanced selection techniques using tools like the magic wand. There is the occasional lag between the dialog and screen animations, but overall, a good set of tutorials, well worth the price.



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photography-related tools that even CS did not contain. Interestingly, CS2 has inherited a couple of capable tools from its lesser stable-mate. Red eye removal is a simple way to neutralize the glowing red eyeballs that often happen when you use an on-camera flash. Another useful tool for controlling digital noise, which are mis-coloured pixels that appear randomly in photos you've taken at high ISO settings (or low light conditions), is the noise reduction filter.

Photoshop CS2 is relatively expensive. That, and the fact that less expensive packages like Photoshop Elements 3 and Corel (Jasc) Paint Shop Pro 9 are also improving with each revision, make the decision to pay the extra freight for CS2 more difficult. Choice can be a wonderful thing.

By David Tanaka

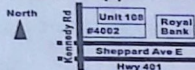
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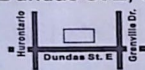
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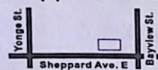
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P530-3.0G/550-3.4G \$828/\$948

Super P630 3.0GE 2M \$978

ASUS P6GD - DX M.8 915P
DDR2 533 1024M PC4200
W.D 200G SATA 7200r 8M H.D
LG 4163 16X DVD/RW
8-Chan Sound & Gigabit LAN O/B
ATI/Sapp X800PRO 256M 16x PCIE
Side Window Case/550W Dual Fan
Logitech W-less Optical K.B & Mouse
Logitech X-530 5.1 Sub-W Speaker
P4-640/650 \$1048/\$1168

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19" SAMSUNG 915N LCD 700:1 \$439
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USB 2.0 128M/256M/512M \$18/28/38
(2M)40G/80G/120G \$58/62/85
(8M)80G/160G/200G/250G \$65/90/109/128
(SATA 8M) 160G/200G/250G \$96/116/130
2.5" 5400RPM 8M 40G/60G/80G \$82/98/135
DVD/CDRW
LG 16x DVD-ROM \$25
LG 52x32x52 CDRW \$27
LG 16x DVD & 52x CDRW \$40
LG 4163 16x DVD+-RW 4X DL \$51
NEC 3540 16X DVD+-RW 6X/4X DL \$53
PIONEER 110 16X DVD+-RW 6X DL \$58

Video Card

Mercury TV TUNER CARD \$38
WinFast TV 2000XP Expert \$63
ATI Radeon 9250 128M TVO DVI \$43
MSI Fx5200 128M AGP DVI TVO \$46
ATI R9550 256M/9600P 256M \$75/95
LEADTAK 6200 128M AGP \$93
ATI/SAP X550PRO 128/256M PCIE \$75/79
Gigabyte FX 6600GT 128M PCIE \$199

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ACER AS3502NLCI Celeron-M 1.4
256MB, 40GB, 15" TFT, DVD/CDRW, 802.11g XP HOME \$799
ACER AS302WLCI-XPX Sempron 2800+ 40GB
256MB, 15.4" WXGA TFT, DVD/CDRW, 802.11g XP HOME \$828
ACER AS1602LCI-XPX Centrino 1.73GHz
512MB, 80GB, 15.4" DVD+-RW, 802.11g, 56k, XP HOME \$1069
ACER TM4011WLMi-XPX Centrino 1.6G 60GB
512MB, 15.4" WXGA TFT, DVD+-RW, 802.11g, XP HOME \$1089

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LG L1780Q <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17" LCD 1280x1024 264mm 600:1 DM 8ms 250cd/m2 <p>*After \$50 MIR (till Sept 18 '05)</p> <p>\$450*</p>	LG LS50-AGHU1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celeron 1.7GHz 1024MB DDR 400 HD Intel 855GE Video 15" XGA DVD/CDRW Wireless G, XP Home <p>\$1299</p>	LG MF-FD150 Mp3 Player <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 256M Memory Mp3, WMA, ZIP Silver, USB Interface LCD Display <p>\$70</p>
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D-Link * After \$10 instant rebate

DI-624 4P Router <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wireless-B/G Range up to 400M 10Mbps 128MB WEP <p>\$80*</p>	DI-524 4P Router <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wireless-B/G Range up to 400M 54Mbps 128MB WEP <p>\$59*</p>	DI-604 4P Router <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced Firewall Parental Control Support UPnP <p>\$41*</p>
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ASUS M3NP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pentium M725 1.6GHz Intel 855 40GB 512MB DDR 14" TFT DVD/CDRW Wireless G <p>\$1320</p>	COMPAQ EVO N400C <ul style="list-style-type: none"> P3-850 20GB HD CD-ROM Docking Station Included <p>\$430</p>	ACER AS5002WLM1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AMD Turion4 3000+ 80GB 512M DDR 15.4" WXGA DVD+/-RW Wireless G <p>\$1148</p>
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Leadtek Px7800 GTX Video Card <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nvidia GeForce 4.0 SLI Technology 256M memory Dual DVI PCI Express <p>\$728</p>	EPSON ML-1610 Laser Printer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 600 dpi 17ppm 2M RAM USB 8.5x14" <p>*After \$30 Mail-in Rebate (till Sept 6 '05) \$119*</p>	ASUS Pundit-AE3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AMD Athlon/Sempron Socket 754 600FSB 5S Chipset PC2700/3200 RAM 2x PCI 1xAGP <p>\$180</p>
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ENEMAX EG701AX-VE SFMA 2.0 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 600W PS ATX 12V v2 Smart Fan Ring Core <p>\$178</p>	ENEMAX EG465P-VE 24P <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 in 1 Series for Dual CPU MB Intel Xeon, AMD MP PCI Ready Low Noise Ultra Cool <p>\$83</p>	DAYTEK Portable DVD Player JOP-830 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8.4" LCD Widescreen Progressive scan NTSC / PAL <p>\$300</p>
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ViewSonic VA712B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17" LCD 1280x1024 350:1 8ms 350cd/m2 built-in speakers <p>\$310</p>	Logitech Mobile Pro Bluetooth Headset <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 Ft Range 7 Hours Talk time 300 Hours Standby <p>\$55</p>	USB 2.0 Pen Drive 128M <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speed up to 480Mbps Read: 17MB/s (max) Write: 14MB/s (max) Operating Indicate LED Firmware Upgradable <p>256MB \$26 1024MB \$77 \$20</p>
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Surveillance Camera <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Color CMOS Wireless 1.2GHz Mini Camera Mini Receiver Audio Function 50M Distance Board Lens <p>\$99</p>	SPY Camera <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Color CMOS Wireless 1.2GHz Mini Camera Mini Receiver Board Lens 50M Distance <p>\$99</p>	Digital Surveillance Capture Card <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High Speed Recording Off site Viewing via LAN Object Search Motion Detection Multi Screen Monitoring <p>\$213</p>
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Value Barebone Series

- MB: Giga Byte GA-5561FXM-RZ S5561FX chipset
- RAM: Kingston 256MB DDR 400MHz
- FD: Sony 3.5" 1.44M FD
- HD: Maxtor 9050S IDE HD 7200rpm 2M
- Video: SIS 610FX Chipset
- Optical Drive: LG 8526B 52x CDRW
- Sound: Onboard Sound
- LAN: Onboard 10/100 RJ45 LAN
- Case: Mid-Tower with 350 ATX P/S

(Optional: Operating System, KB, Mouse & Monitor)

Celeron D320	Celeron D330	P4-3.0E Ghz
\$359	\$369	\$509

Platinum 775 Series

- MB: Giga Byte GA-915P Dual Intel 915P
- RAM: Kingston 1G (2x512M) PC3200
- FD: Mitsumi FA404M 7-in-1 Card Reader/Floppy Drive
- HD: 160GB Master DiamondMax 133
- Video: Giga Byte Radeon x300SE 128M DVI/TV out
- Monitor: LG 1910a 19" LCD 400:1 25ms
- Optical Drive: LG 4022B 8x DVD+/-RW
- Audio: Onboard 8 Channel Audio
- LAN: Onboard 8001 GbLAN
- Case: Mid-Tower (8319) with 360W PS
- KB: Logitech Multimedia Keyboard
- Mouse: Logitech WheelMouse Optical
- Speakers: JBL Platinum Series 2.0 System

(Optional: Operating System)

P4 531 3.0E Ghz	P4 550 3.4E Ghz
\$1305	\$1439

Diamond 775 Series

- MB: Giga Byte GA-5561FXM-775 S5561FX chipset
- RAM: Kingston 512MB DDR PC3200
- FD: Sony 1.44M FLOPPY DRIVE 3.12"
- HD: 160GB Master DiamondMax 133
- Video: Onboard SIS 610FX Chipset
- Monitor: LG 1750a 17" 1280x1024 500:1 12ms
- Optical Drive: LG 4022B 8x DVD+/-RW
- Audio: Onboard 8 Channel Audio
- Case: Mid-Tower (8319) 400W P/S
- KB: Compaq PS/2 Keyboard
- Mouse: Logitech B100 WheelMouse Optical
- Speakers: JBL Platinum Series 2.0 System

(Optional: Operating System)

P4 531 3.0E	P4 550 3.4E
\$999	\$1139

Platinum 939 Series

- MB: GigaByte GA-KNF-9 NVIDIA nForce4 chipset
- RAM: Kingston 1G (2x512M) DDR PC3200
- FD: Mitsumi FA404M 7-in-1 Card Reader/Floppy Drive
- HD: 160GB Master SATA Drive
- Video: GigaByte Radeon x300SE 128M DVI TV-Out
- Monitor: LG 1910a 19" LCD 400:1 25ms
- Optical Drive: LG 4022B 8x DVD+/-RW
- Audio: Onboard 8 Channel Audio
- LAN: Onboard Gb LAN
- Case: Antec Sonata Mid Tower with 360W PS
- KB: Logitech Multimedia KB and Optical Mouse
- Speakers: HW-4218 2.1 Speakers System

(Optional: Operating System)

Athlon 64 3000+	AMD 64 3500+
\$1289	\$1379

Diamond 754 Series

- MB: Asus K8V-X VIA K8T80 chipset
- RAM: Kingston 512M DDR 400MHz
- FD: Sony 1.44M Floppy Drive 3.12"
- HD: 160GB Master IDE 133
- Video: Giga Byte Radeon 9250 128M AGP TV Out
- Monitor: LG 1750B 17" 1280 x 1024 50:1 12ms
- Optical Drive: LG 4022B 8x DVD+/-RW
- Audio: Onboard 8 Channel Audio
- LAN: Onboard 8001 GbLAN
- Case: Mid-Tower (8319) with 400W P/S
- KB: Compaq PS/2 Keyboard
- Mouse: Logitech B100 WheelMouse Optical
- Speakers: JBL Platinum Series 2.0 System

(Optional: Operating System)

2800+	3000+	3100+
\$909	\$919	\$949

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Video Editing Package

\$1819



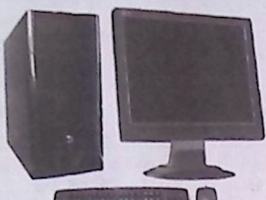
Intel Pentium 4 LGA 3.0GHz 1mb cache, Asus motherboard P5GD Deluxe, 1GB DDR2 533 mhz memory, Seagate 160GB 7,200 rpm SATA2 drive, ATI All in Wonder X5600 PRO PCI-E 256mb, Viewsonic VP1718-2 17" 8ms LCD, Liteon 16x DVD Writer Dual Layer, Antec Sonata Super Quiet Case, Logitech Keyboard and Optical mouse, Antec Lansing 2.1 speakers, Windows XP Pro, Onboard 8 Channel Digital sound, Firewire, 1000 LAN, USB2, SATA, Twin RAID controllers
As listed (#C57443) **\$1859.00**

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- 15 inch LCD flat panel 1024x768 display
- Deluxe mid tower case with up front USB ports
- CSA certified 450 watt power supply
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- LG 16x Dual Layer DVD burner with software
- Microsoft Windows XP Home edition
- Two Year Parts & Labour warranty



Complete Package as listed...

\$849

Online shopping part #GT-SYSQ58419

acer Notebooks

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- 60gb hard drive with 2mb cache
- DVD Writer with + and - support
- 15.4 inch Wide WXGA display 1280x800
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- Up to 5 1/2 hours of battery runtime

\$1369



Acer Centrino Great Price!

- 1.6GHz Centrino, 512mb, 60gb drive, 15" display, Windows XP Pro, Wireless LAN, CD/Writer + DVD AC-4150LCIP **\$1253.95**



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Acer Centurio Notebook

- Intel 2.0GHz Centrino, 512mb, 80gb drive, 15" display, Windows XP Pro, Wireless LAN, DVD Writer AC-4654LMI-P **\$1839.95**



Acer AMD Notebook

- 1.6GHz Turion, 512mb memory, 80gb drive, 15.4" wide display, Windows XP Home, Wireless LAN, DVD Writer AC-AS5002WLMH **\$1155.95**



Acer Pentium 4 Notebook

- 3.20GHz P4, 512mb memory, 100gb drive, 17" Wide display, ATI X600, Windows XP Pro, WLAN, DVD Writer AC-AS1804WLMH **\$2118.95**



Acer Centurio Notebook

- Intel 1.8GHz Centrino, 1GB, 100gb drive, 15.4" wide display, Windows XP Home, Wireless LAN, DVD Writer AC-AS1684WLMH **\$1678.95**



FLASH MEMORY

COMPACT FLASH (CF)

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|----------------------|------|---------------------|------|
| Kingston 128mb | 24" | Lexar 16x 1gb | 112" |
| Kingston 256mb | 33" | Lexar 40x 1gb | 130" |
| Kingston 512mb | 51" | Lexar 80x 1gb | 69" |
| Kingston 1gb | 64" | Lexar 80x 2gb | 134" |
| Kingston 2gb | 149" | Lexar 80x 2gb | 264" |

FLASH DRIVES

USB PORTABLE DRIVES

- | | | | |
|--------------------|------|-----------------------|------|
| Apacer 128mb | 32" | Lexar 40x 256mb | 40" |
| Apacer 256mb | 40" | Lexar 40x 512mb | 53" |
| Apacer 512mb | 63" | Lexar 40x 1gb | 103" |
| Apacer 1gb | 89" | Lexar 100x 1gb | 132" |
| Apacer 2gb | 177" | Lexar 120x 2gb | 262" |

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250GB (#GT-MINI250PRO) 249"

300GB (#GT-MINI300PRO) 289"

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From **\$589**



Intel Pentium 4 LGA 3.0GHz processor 800sf, Asus motherboard AS-P5500-VM, 512MB DDR memory, Seagate 40GB 7,200 rpm drive, LG CD-ROM drive, Antec 2U or 4U Rack Mount case, Heavy duty power supply, Onboard LAN, USB2.0, Video. Built-in RAID controller for expansion.
2U Server (#C56255) \$829.00
4U Server (#C5564) \$749.00
Also available in a 2.8GHz Core version with 256mb of memory - 4U (#C57833) \$589.00

RAID 1 4U Server

Intel Pentium 4 3.0GHz 800sf, Asus motherboard 100/1000 LAN, 1024mb DDR dual channel memory, Twin 120GB Seagate SATA2 hard drives, CD-ROM, Floppy drive, RAID 0/1 onboard, 4U 400 watt rackmount chassis
4U Server (#C56249) \$949.00

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- Windows & Apple support
- USB interface

Model X5250

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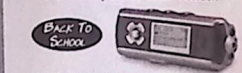
EPSON Inkjets

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| R200 Photo/DVD/CD Printer | 132 ⁹⁵ |
| R320 Photo/DVD/CD Printer | 217 ⁹⁵ |
| R800 Photo/DVD/CD Printer | 454 ⁹⁵ |
| R2400 Photo/DVD/CD Printer | 968 ⁹⁵ |
| 4000 Photo Print Engine | 2314 ⁹⁵ |
| 4800 Photo Print Engine | 2314 ⁹⁵ |
- HEWLETT PACKARD All-In-One**
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|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1510PSC Print/Scan/Copy | 130 ⁹⁵ |
| 4215MFP Print/Scan/Copy/Fax | 158 ⁹⁵ |
| 5510MFP Print/Scan/Copy/Fax | 191 ⁹⁵ |

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Complete kit with 256mb memory

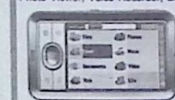
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|---|-------------------|
| iRiver iFP7901 MP3/Voice/FM 256mb | 118 ⁹⁵ |
| iRiver iFP7951 MP3/Voice/FM 512mb | 168 ⁹⁵ |
| iRiver iFP7991 MP3/Voice/FM 1gb | 227 ⁹⁵ |
| iRiver H10 MP3/Voice/FM 5gb | 334 ⁹⁵ |
| iRiver PMP120 Movie/MP3/FM 5gb | 544 ⁹⁵ |
| Creative Muvo TX FM 512mb | 165 ⁹⁵ |
| Creative Muvo TX FM 1024mb | 186 ⁹⁵ |
| Creative Nomad X Mini Silver 5GB | 243 ⁹⁵ |
| Creative Zin Touch 2008 | 311 ⁹⁵ |
| Creative Zin Touch 4008 | 385 ⁹⁵ |
| Creative Nomad Zin 3008 | 295 ⁹⁵ |
| Creative Multi Media Center 20GB | 573 ⁹⁵ |

SCANNERS

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|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| EPSON 2480 Photo 2400x4800 | 128 ⁹⁵ |
| 2580 Photo 2400x4800 motorized | 189 ⁹⁵ |
| 4180 Photo 4800x9600 | 248 ⁹⁵ |
| 4870 Photo 4800x9600 | 456 ⁹⁵ |
| 4990 Photo 4800x9600 | 568 ⁹⁵ |
| 4990 Photo Pro 4800x9600 | 753 ⁹⁵ |

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Complete kit with charger, USB cable, and carrying bag
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| lpaq 2750 (634MHz, 128mb, Blue/WiFi) | 568 ⁹⁵ |
| lpaq 3115 (630MHz, 128mb, Blue/WiFi) | 393 ⁹⁵ |
| lpaq 4350 (400MHz, 64mb, Blue/WiFi) | 585 ⁹⁵ |
| lpaq 4700 (634MHz, 192mb, Blue/WiFi) | 646 ⁹⁵ |

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- lpaq 6320 (175mb, Phone/Blue/WiFi) 601⁹⁵
- lpaq GPS Bluetooth mapping add-on 361⁹⁵
- lpaq Keyboard Folding/Bluetooth 127⁹⁵

ASUS

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- A730W (533MHz/54mb/640x480 colour Blue/WiFi) 697⁹⁵

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- Zire 31 (200MHz, 16mb, Colour) 177⁹⁵
- Zire 72 (312MHz, 24mb, Colour) 303⁹⁵
- Zire 72 GPS Kit (Zire 72, 4mb memory card, GPS receiver, car windshield holder, charger) 504⁹⁵
- Tungsten E2 (200MHz, 32mb) 243⁹⁵
- Tungsten T5 (410MHz, 16mb, Blue) 390⁹⁵

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INTEL PENTIUM 4 LGA Retail	
3.00GHz (800MHz, 1mb, P4-530)	255 ⁹⁵
3.00GHz (64-bit, 2mb, P4-630)	241 ⁹⁵
3.00GHz (800MHz, 1mb, P4-540)	300 ⁹⁵
3.20GHz (64-bit, 2mb, P4-640)	294 ⁹⁵
3.40GHz (800MHz, 1mb, P4-650)	365 ⁹⁵
3.60GHz (64-bit, 2mb, P4-660)	524 ⁹⁵
INTEL PENTIUM 4 Dual Core Retail	
2.80GHz (800MHz, 2mb, P4-820)	327 ⁹⁵
3.00GHz (800MHz, 2mb, P4-830)	423 ⁹⁵
AMD ATHLON 4 Dual Core Retail	
3000+ Socket 939 (Venice 333MHz)	198 ⁹⁵
3500+ Socket 939 (Venice 333MHz)	284 ⁹⁵
3800+ Socket 939 (Venice 333MHz)	407 ⁹⁵
AMD ATHLON 4 Dual Core Retail	
4200+ X2 (512kb + 512kb)	597 ⁹⁵
4400+ X2 (1mb + 1mb)	663 ⁹⁵

MOTHERBOARDS

FOR INTEL PROCESSORS

ASUS P4S800-MX w/video PGA	78 ⁹⁵
G.B. GA-8S661FXMP w/video PGA	68 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5S800-V w/video LGA	77 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5P800 LGA	127 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5GD1-VM w/video LGA	132 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5GD1 LGA	134 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5LD2-VM w/video LGA	141 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5LD2 LGA	165 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5GDC-DX LGA 915	187 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5AD2-E-DX LGA 925	226 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5AD2-E-PRM LGA	243 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5WD2-PRE LGA	277 ⁹⁵
ASUS P5ND2-SLI-DX LGA NF4	277 ⁹⁵

FOR AMD PROCESSORS

ASUS KBV-X (Athlon 64 754)	87 ⁹⁵
ASUS A8V (Athlon 64 939 K78)	125 ⁹⁵
ASUS A8N-E (Athlon 64 939 NF4)	141 ⁹⁵
ASUS A8N-SLI (Athlon 64 939 NF4)	173 ⁹⁵

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SEAGATE EIDE (PATA)	
40GB (ST340011A) 2mb 5years	70 ⁹⁵
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120GB (ST3120022A) 2mb 5years	96 ⁹⁵
120GB (ST3120022A) 8mb 5years	106 ⁹⁵
160GB (ST3160022A) 8mb 5years	111 ⁹⁵
200GB (ST320022A) 8mb 5years	146 ⁹⁵
250GB (ST325022A) 8mb 5years	166 ⁹⁵
SEAGATE SERIAL (SATA)	
80GB (ST380817AS) 8mb SA 2TA	84 ⁹⁵
120GB (ST3120827AS) 8mb SA 2TA	116 ⁹⁵
160GB (ST3160827AS) 8mb SA 2TA	129 ⁹⁵
200GB (ST3200827AS) 8mb SA 2TA	154 ⁹⁵
250GB (ST3250827AS) 8mb SA 2TA	204 ⁹⁵
300GB (ST3300817AS) 8mb SA 2TA	216 ⁹⁵
400GB (ST3400832AS) 8mb SA 2TA	375 ⁹⁵

CASES

GREY-TECH	
GT-5130 (450 watts, USB, Beige)	38 ⁹⁵
RM-C4S 4u Rackmount	179 ⁹⁵
ANTEC	
SONATA I (380 watts, USB)	138 ⁹⁵
SONATA II (430 watts, USB)	142 ⁹⁵
SLK1650/B (350 watts, USB)	91 ⁹⁵
SLK2650/BQE (350 watts, USB)	103 ⁹⁵
P180 Extreme Case (no power)	170 ⁹⁵

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OPTICAL DRIVES

CD-ROMS	
Liteon 52x	19 ⁹⁵
DVD-ROMS	
LG/Liteon DVD 16X	31 ⁹⁵ /34 ⁹⁵
CD WRITERS	
LG (GCE-8527B) 52x/32x/52	34 ⁹⁵
COMBINATION DRIVES	
LG (4521) 52x CD/RW, 16x DVD	47 ⁹⁵
DVD WRITERS	
Pioneer (DVR-110) 16x + 16x -8x DL	66 ⁹⁵
Pioneer (DVR-110EXT External Kit)	169 ⁹⁵
Plextor (PX-740A) 16x + 16x -8x DL	132 ⁹⁵
Plextor (PX-716SA) 16x + 8x -	167 ⁹⁵
Plextor (PX-716A) 16x + 8x -Slot	205 ⁹⁵
LG (A1638B) 16x + 16x -DL	60 ⁹⁵
Liteon (16735) 16x + 16x -DL	85 ⁹⁵
Asus (1608P) 16x + 16x -DL	73 ⁹⁵
HP (640) Lightscribe 16x + 8x -2.4x +DL 93	

DVD DUPLICATORS

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3 Target unit (w/GT-DVQ5555)	619 ⁹⁵
5 Target unit (w/GT-DVQ57097)	739 ⁹⁵
7 Target unit (w/GT-DVQ56516)	859 ⁹⁵
9 Target unit (w/GT-DVQ56517)	1109 ⁹⁵

VIDEO CARDS

ASUS	
R9250-TD 128MB, DVI, AGP	56 ⁹⁵
X300SE-X 128MB, DVI, PCIE	75 ⁹⁵
X600XTD 128MB, DVI, PCIE	260 ⁹⁵
X700PRO 256MB, DVI, PCIE	228 ⁹⁵
6600 256MB, DVI, PCIE	165 ⁹⁵
6600GT 128MB, DVI, PCIE	238 ⁹⁵
6800GT 256MB, PCIE	480 ⁹⁵
7800GT 256MB, PCIE	525 ⁹⁵
7800GT 256MB, PCIE	643 ⁹⁵
X800XL 256MB, PCIE	359 ⁹⁵
X800XT 256MB, PCIE	593 ⁹⁵

ATI TECHNOLOGIES

X800XL 256MB, DVI, PCIE	386 ⁹⁵
AIW X600 Pro 256MB, DVI, PCIE	259 ⁹⁵
AIW X800XT 256MB, DVI, AGP	492 ⁹⁵

SAPPHIRE

X300SE 128MB, DVI, PCIE	69 ⁹⁵
X600Pro 128MB, PCIE	105 ⁹⁵
X800XL 256MB, DVI, PCIE	357 ⁹⁵
X850XT 256MB, DVI, PCIE	474 ⁹⁵

GIGABYTE

6600GT 128MB, DVI, PCIE	214 ⁹⁵
7800GT 256MB, DVI, PCIE	214 ⁹⁵

TV TUNING/CAPTURE


HAUPPAUGE	
150Mce for Windows Media Center Ed.	89 ⁹⁵
701 WINTV GO EXTERNAL TUNING USB	98 ⁹⁵
990 WINTV-PVR 350 REMOTE MPEG2	231 ⁹⁵
PLEXTOR	
PX-TV402U CONVERTER USB2 MPEG2	223 ⁹⁵
ASUS	
TV FM Card w/REMOTE CONTROL	60 ⁹⁵
MSI TUNER FOR NOTEBOOKS	80 ⁹⁵

POWER SUPPLIES

ENERMAX	
Dual Fan 350 watts	59 ⁹⁵
Noise Taker EG425P 420 watts	81 ⁹⁵
Noise Taker EG495 480 watts	95 ⁹⁵
Noise Taker All-In-One 535 watts	115 ⁹⁵
GREY-TECH 450 watts, CSA	24 ⁹⁵
ANTEC TruePower 550 watts	140 ⁹⁵

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17" VX724 4ms (available early Aug)	379 ⁹⁵
17" VP1718-B 25ms 500:1 DVI	412 ⁹⁵
19" VG900B 25ms 600:1	389 ⁹⁵
19" VP924 4ms 500:1 DVI	523 ⁹⁵
19" VP1918-B 8ms 700:1, DVI, rotatable, full spectrum for photographic work	567 ⁹⁵
20" VP2018 16ms 400:1	791 ⁹⁵
21" VP2118 25ms 600:1	1045 ⁹⁵
23" VP2318WB wide 16ms 500:1	1692 ⁹⁵

SAMSUNG

17" 172X 12ms 500:1 DVI	595 ⁹⁵
19" 910V 25ms 800:1	562 ⁹⁵
19" 913VII 12ms 800:1	434 ⁹⁵


ACER

15" AL1511B 25ms 350:1	250 ⁹⁵
17" AL1715W 12ms 450:1	284 ⁹⁵
19" AL1913B 23ms 600:1	364 ⁹⁵

BENQ

17" FP71G + 8ms 600:1	323 ⁹⁵
17" FP71V + 10ms 500:1	430 ⁹⁵
19" FP91G + 8ms 550:1	452 ⁹⁵

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DVD+R 16x	50 pack \$31 ⁹⁵ , 200 pack \$116 ⁹⁵

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Jewel Case Double Acrylic	39 ⁹⁵
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SPECIAL DVD Case DOUBLE VINYL	39 ⁹⁵
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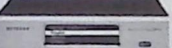
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VIEWSONIC N3000W 30" TV with HD 720p/1280x768 resolution	1450 ⁹⁵
VIEWSONIC N3200W 32" TV with HD 720p/1280x768 resolution	1736 ⁹⁵
VIEWSONIC N4000W 40" TV with HD 720p/1280x768 resolution	4550 ⁹⁵

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Link Wireless Router DL-624 (g)	92 ⁹⁵
Link Wireless PCI Card DML-G510 (g)	56 ⁹⁵
Link Wireless PCI Card DML-G520 (g)	68 ⁹⁵
Link Wireless PC Card DML-G630 (g)	56 ⁹⁵
Link Wireless PC Card DML-G650 (g)	68 ⁹⁵
Link Wireless Access Point DML-2100AP (g)	127 ⁹⁵
Link Wireless PCI Card DML-520x (4x)	54 ⁹⁵
Link Wireless USB Port DML-G122 (g)	54 ⁹⁵
Asus Wireless PCI Card with ext. ant. (g)	46 ⁹⁵
Linksys Wireless Router WRT54GL (b)	70 ⁹⁵
Linksys Wireless Router WRT54GL (g) for notebooks with 802.11g router and laptop card	109 ⁹⁵

ROUTERS

Link Router 4-port, Di-604	47 ⁹⁵
Link Router 4-port w/LPT Di-704P	78 ⁹⁵
Link Router 4-port Portable DML-G730AP	88 ⁹⁵
Linksys Router 4-port NR041	51 ⁹⁵

ADAPTERS

Link 10/100 NIC DFE-538-TX (PCI)	12 ⁹⁵
Link 10/100 NIC DGE-530T (PCI)	34 ⁹⁵

PCMCIA/CARDBUS

Link 10/100 NIC DFE-690TND (Cardbus)	45 ⁹⁵
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HUBS & SWITCHES

Link Switch 5-port 10/100/1000 DGS-1005D	102 ⁹⁵
Link Switch 5-port 10/100/1000 DGS-1000D	164 ⁹⁵
Link Switch 8-port 10/100 DSS-8	44 ⁹⁵
Link Switch 16-port 10/100 DSS-16	103 ⁹⁵
Link Switch 24-port 10/100 DSS-24	150 ⁹⁵
Linksys Switch 4-port PFS44 with built-in USB Print Server	79 ⁹⁵

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as users don't have to pack extra storage media, whether DV tape, mini DVD or whatever. They'd be advised to bring along an extra battery or spring for JVC's higher capacity batteries, however, as the Everio's battery life clocks in at under an hour. While a real boon to portability, the Everio's size can present a problem for larger hands. Specifically, the top-mounted on/off and playback/record mode three-way switch is finicky as choosing the middle playback option is difficult, requiring users to apply just the right amount of pressure to the switch to push it without having it slide all the way to the third setting (record). It's frustrating and requires some adjustment at first.

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Processor	AMD Athlon 64/Athlon 64 FX	AMD Athlon 64/Athlon 64 FX	AMD Athlon™ 64/Athlon™ 64 FX	AMD Athlon™ 64/Sempron™
Chipset	ATI® RS480+SB400	NVIDIA nFORCE™ 4 Ultra	NVIDIA nForce™ 4	NVIDIA nForce™ 4-4X
Memory	Dual-Channel DDR DDR400/333/266 DDR SDRAM	Dual-Channel DDR DDR400/333/266/200 DDR SDRAM	Dual-Channel DDR DDR400/333/266 DDR SDRAM	DDR400/333/266/200 DDR SDRAM
Graphics	On Chip Radeon X300 based	PCI Express x16	PCI Express x16	PCI Express x16
Communication	10/100 LAN	Dual LAN	Giga LAN	Giga LAN
Others	Serial ATA, 6-Channel Audio	IEEE 1394A, Serial ATA, 6-Channel Audio	Serial ATA, 6-Channel Audio	Serial ATA, 6-Channel Audio

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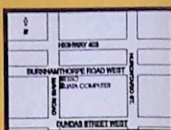
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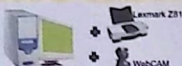
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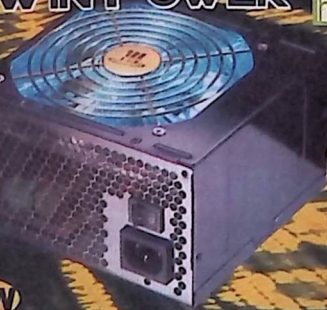
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zoom. Even with the digital image stabilization, any amount of digital zoom nets a shaky picture unless the user is a human Steady Cam.

The scene is only displayed on a bright flip-out 2.5-inch LCD display that rotates through 270 degrees, and that allows for shooting in a variety of positions, including over the top of a crowd or at kid-level.

Recording to hard disk offers many benefits. Chief among them perhaps is the fact that clips can be navigated in an interface similar to a digital camera for near instant scene selection. Once you get used to this way of thinking about digital video still in-camera, going back to the

"old way" seems incredibly cumbersome.

One place where hard disks have their failing, though, is in durability. Every consumer electronics device is going to have to take its knocks and camcorders – no matter how careful we may be – are no exception. The micro hard drive in the Everio is cushioned on a floating suspension system to protect it from shocks, JVC says. Also, a force sensor shuts off the camera and locks the hard disk in case of a sudden change in acceleration to protect it from a head crash, which would be a terminal blow.

This is great in concept and likely effective in protecting the hard drive against damage – we didn't test this feature by actually allowing the unit to hit the floor – but could prove problematic in instances where sudden changes in downward acceleration are the norm, such as mountain biking, snowboarding or skateboarding. The gravity sensor shuts down the camera within a drop of about 20 cm. This feature can be turned off, but that leaves the hard disk in peril.

The camera records in MPEG-2 format, the same standard as DVD. This avoids the processing and time involved in converting video as it's brought in to the PC or burned to a DVD. JVC offers an optional stand-alone DVD burner for pulling video directly from the camera. The model tested can record up to 4.5 hours of video at DVD movie quality (9Mbps) or nine hours at TV quality (4.5Mbps). The larger hard drive models can record up to seven and 14 hours of DVD movie and TV quality video respectively.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

Info Box

Everio GZ-MG40U www.jvc.ca Price: \$1099

Video format: MPEG-2-PS / Audio: Dolby Digital

Still format: JPEG (PictureBridge, DPOF compatible)

Storage media: 1.8-inch embedded 20GB HDD, SD memory card (not included)

Image sensor: 1/4.5-inch, 1.33-megapixel CCD

Lens: F1.2-2.8 (f=3.0-45 mm)

Shutter speed: 1/2 - 1/4000 (video), 1/2 - 1/500 (still)

Zoom ratio: 15x optical / up to 700x digital

LCD: 112,000-pixel 2.5-inch LCD

Power source: Battery: 7.2V/AC adapter: 11V

Dimensions: (LxWxH) 109x70x57 mm

Weight: 380 g with standard battery

Pros:

- Small, lightweight
- Instant playback of any clip
- No storage media to lug around

Cons:

- Hard disk drive still the Achilles heel
- No optical image stabilizer
- Battery life a potential issue
- No FireWire interface



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DV, or Not DV

Getting in Sync with Home Editing

You can do it online. You can do automatically. And you can do it-yourself.

We talked about video editing last time, and the companies that will let you upload, edit and watch your own programs on the Web. [Shortly after the article was published, Google formally launched its own video service. The service is free – for now.]

There are also tools that will do the editing for you, using software that automatically recognizes scene changes and incorporates built-in facial recognition and music sequencing capabilities. It's almost spooky what these programs can do!

But most of you still want to edit your own video, so, as promised, let's start looking at how to set up a home edit suite – and how to get the most from it.

We are going to try and be "platform agnostic" throughout; there are terrific video editing solutions for the PC, for the Mac, and even for Linux-based open source machines. There are also dedicated edit appliances – scaled-down computers that do nothing but edit video.

Computer-phobes may like the stand-alone edit appliance, like Applied Magic's ScreenPlay or MacroSystem's Casablanca. Everything you need is included: video capture and editing tools, hard drive storage, keyboard and mouse. You can use a regular TV with them, so an extra computer monitor may not be needed. Both boxes allow analog or DV footage to be imported



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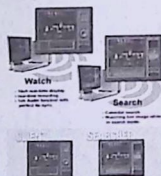
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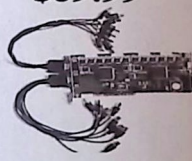
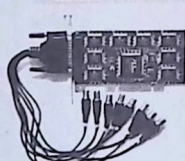
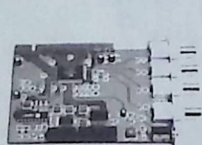
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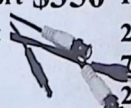
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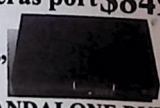
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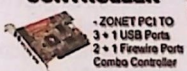
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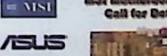
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[captured]. You can then arrange and re-arrange the shots to your heart's content, adding effects, titles and music. The finished program can then be exported to tape or DVD.

You'll need a video capture card for bringing video into your PC. [Macs have a built-in card.] We talked about external A-to-D converters, used for turning analog into digital, in a previous column, and many of the same products can capture digital signals from a camcorder, as well.

Get Slotted

An internal capture card requires you to crack open your PC case and physically install the card. Available slots may be called ISA, PCI, AGP or PCI Express [PCI slots have short white connectors; ISAs are black, AGP are brown].

ISA [Industry Standard Adapter] is the oldest and slowest of the bunch, with support for 8- and 16-bit cards [usually stuff like sound cards and modems].

PCI [Peripheral Connect Interface] are 32-bit cards that transfer data quickly and take up less space on the motherboard.

Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) bypasses the slower PCI and ISA slots and provides faster 3D video.

PCI Express [PCI-X] cards are similar to AGPs; the physical size and layout are comparable, but the connections are not interchangeable. They are newer and faster, and some PCI Express configurations can move video at up to 4GB/s – double the AGP throughput!

Even so, internal capture cards are typically less expensive than external cards, and often have more advanced functions – your computer



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can become a video recorder, and you could be watching TV with a tuner built in. There are literally hundreds of video card manufacturers, and it just so happens that two of the best, ATI and Matrox, are Canadian companies.

Regardless of its origins, the card must be compatible with the camera and editing gear you intend to use with it. Video is usually not an issue; with analog (composite RCA and S-video) and digital (IEEE 1394 or FireWire) input and output, a capture card will deal well with incoming video signals.

Get Synced

Audio and video can slip out of sync in the digital realm, so that sounds seem to come from an echo chamber. It's the nature of the beast: digitally processing video signals is always more resource-intensive than digitally processing audio signals. Manufacturers use a "clock" to try and lock the audio and video together.

In some products, however, the quality of the clock is debatable. While in most cases, the specs are accurate, be aware that a sound card recording at 44.1 kHz may be off by what seems an infinitesimal amount (about 0.005%) and still cause major sync problems.

Some DV cameras and VTRs generate unlocked audio, whether it's a 32k, 12-bit recording or in 48k, 16-bit. DVCAM and DVCPRO generate locked audio in 48k, 16-bit audio format [DVCAM adds locked 32k, 12-bit audio], and 44.1k CD quality audio is never locked.

Between your camera's record settings, the functions of your capture

card, and the capabilities of your computer editing system, there are several places for you to have a mismatched settings that will almost certainly introduce problems. Make sure all hardware and software settings are "in sync" with each other – such as those for audio specs during camera recording, audio/video capture card settings, and editing program menu preferences.

If necessary, you can sync unsynced audio/video by re-recording the offending material (unlocked audio) to a locked-format VTR. Sometimes, you can capture unlocked audio to the computer and, using software with locked output capabilities, re-sample it, exporting it back out to tape to be used again as a locked format.

As nasty as audio video sync problems can be, they are accepted by the industry to a point. An International Telecommunications Union Radiocommunications Sector (ITU-R) recommendation ITU-R BT.1359-1 [1998] says A/V out-of-sync acceptability thresholds are set at 90 ms for audio leading video and 185 ms for audio lagging video.

Next time, we'll look at what happens when storage space lags behind editing requirements.

By Lee Rickwood

Lee Rickwood is a freelance writer and independent video producer. He operates **Word On A Wire**, an independent company providing editorial, media production and consulting services to individuals and companies across North America. He can be reached at videodaze@videodaze.com.

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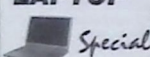
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Sounding off

The latest in home theatre speaker systems to suit all budgets

Let's face it – the big-screen TV is usually the centerpiece of any home theatre setup, so it's not hard to believe that audio is often left as an afterthought.

This is unfortunate, as a motion picture's dialogue, music and sound effects make up a large part of the overall experience.

And let's not forget about the multitude of multi-channel audio options for music lovers, such as concerts on DVD, Super Audio CD (SACD) and DVD-Audio discs.

Heck, even videogames are now recorded or remastered in 5.1 surround sound.

So, along with picking up a receiver/amplifier to split sound into the various channels, don't forget you're going to need a good set of speakers to place around your family room to replicate the movie theatre or concert hall experience.

For the uninitiated, 5.1 surround sound means a different audio track is heard per channel: a center speaker (where an estimated 80 per cent of the movie's dialogue comes from), front left and front right speakers, rear left and rear right speakers, and a subwoofer that delivers that low-frequency bass

(the ".1" in of the 5.1 equation). Some home theatre enthusiasts have a 6.1 or 7.1 setup, which includes an extra rear speaker for 6.1, or left and right rear speakers for 7.1 surround sound.

Here's a look at three recommended surround sound options to suit different budgets:

Entry level

Sony's 7.1 Channel Micro Satellite Speaker System (\$499; model # SA-VE367T) includes six matching micro satellite speakers. The front and rear speakers (each at 4.4 inches by 5.9 inches by 5.19 inches) deliver a maximum of 135 watts per channel, while the slim centre speaker (7.8 inches by 4.4 inches by 4.52 inches), which typically sits above or underneath the television, pumps 120 watts of total power.

Each of the speakers offers a 3.5-inch woofer and half-inch tweeter. The subwoofer (11.41 inches by 15.7 inches by 16.7 inches), also at 135 watts, includes RCA input, speaker inputs, an 8-inch woofer and a form factor designed to increase air flow for extra full bass.

Optional accessories include floor speaker stands (model # WS-FV11D) or wall mounts (model # WS-WV10D).





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Middle of the road

Despite their small size, the five Polk Audio RM 6750 satellite speakers boast a rich, well-balanced sound field thanks to Polk's patented Power Port Bass Vent integrated into each coffee cup-sized speaker. In plain English, this technology delivers an improved midrange to fill the space between the highs (delivered by the half-inch tweeters) and the bass from the subwoofer. Each satellite uses a polymer composite cone driver that is lightweight, durable and clean-sounding.

This \$849 solution, delivering 100 watts of total power per satellite, also includes a 100 watt subwoofer (with 8-inch long throw driver) to shake your fillings loose when helicopters fly around in Black Hawk Down or when dinosaurs stomp on the ground in Jurassic Park.



The satellites, which are available in either a black or titanium finish, include an integrated keyhole slot for easy wall mounting.

High-end system

Entertainment lovers with deep pockets (\$1799 to be exact) will love the Bose Acoustimass 16 surround sound speaker system.

When paired with a compatible receiver, this 6.1-channel solution places you in the middle of your favourite movie, TV show or CD. Six 6-inch cube satellites are placed around the room and deliver crisp highs and midrange frequencies to complement the lows from the subwoofer [Bose calls this component a "module"].

The company also claims listeners can enjoy more than just one "sweet spot" – the perfect place to sit for the most balanced sound, which is typically three-quarters of the way back of the room and in the centre – as the company's proprietary speaker technology can envelop the entire room with a full and balanced sound. Total power for this system is 1200 watts.

An engineering degree may be required to full comprehend the specs for the Acoustimass 16 surround system (www.bose.ca), but your ears don't lie, so if you have the cash to equip your home theatre with top-notch sound, visit your favourite electronics retailer to hear these in action.

By Marc Saltzman



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Resolution: 1280x1024
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Senseye Technology
Response Time: 8ms
Contrast Ratio: 600:1
Brightness: 270 cd/m2
Resolution: 1280x1024
D-Sub Input/DVI Input



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Contrast Ratio: 600:1
Brightness: 400 cd/m2
Resolution: 1280x1024
D-Sub/DVI Input
Speakers 1Wx2



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Contrast Ratio: 650:1
Brightness: 470 cd/m2
Resolution: 1280x1024
D-Sub/DVI Input



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D-Sub/DVI Input
Speakers 2Wx2



FP91G+
(Black)
19" Flat Panel LCD
Response Time: 8ms
Contrast Ratio: 650:1
Brightness: 280 cd/m2
Resolution: 1280x1024
D-Sub/DVI Input



FP91V+
(Silver-Black)
19" Flat Panel LCD
Senseye Technology
Polished Screen
Response Time: 12ms (6ms GTG)
Contrast Ratio: 600:1
Brightness: 420 cd/m2
Resolution: 1280x1024
D-Sub/DVI Input



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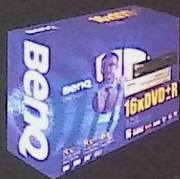
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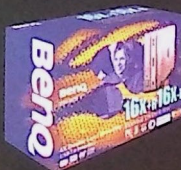
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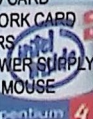
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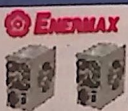
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Nokia 6101

Nokia and Rogers Wireless recently announced the Canadian availability of the Nokia 6101 phone as part of a back to school promotion.

The 6101 is a flip phone, which is something of a rarity in Nokia's line, especially when looking at budget-oriented handsets.

Nokia and Rogers are pushing the organization, MMS messaging, FM radio and VGA camera as the perfect accompaniment to a student's lifestyle.

With two colour LCD displays – the inner 128x160 and the outer 98x65 pixels – Nokia says the 6101 is perfect for capturing self-portraits as the smaller outer screen below the camera lens acts as a secondary viewfinder when the phone closed while in camera mode.

The handset is available now from Rogers for about \$50 with a three-year contract agreement or \$175 with a one-year service plan contract.

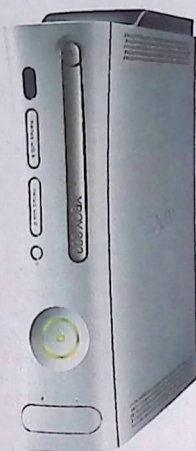


Xbox 360

The Xbox division of Microsoft Home Entertainment just announced a starting Canadian price point for the Xbox 360 of \$399.99.

First out of the gate for the next generation of home videogame consoles and in stores in time for the holiday season, the basic Xbox 360 package includes a wired controller, "chill" white console faceplate, a standard AV cable, and of course the console itself. Conspicuously absent is the hard drive that is synonymous with Xbox in the current generation.

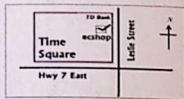
For an extra \$100, gamers get a more reasonable bundle that substitutes the wired controller for a wireless one, includes a 20GB removable hard drive, headset, Silver level Xbox Live membership (Gold or better required for online multiplayer), a Component HD-AV cable for high-definition as well as standard-definition AV connections, and for a limited time, a bonus media remote to take full advantage of the Xbox 360's much hyped media capabilities.



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Consider it a set-top box that connects to a television (or stereo receiver) that enables you to wirelessly access music, pictures and videos stored on a computer's hard drive. It can also be used to stream select Internet radio stations and services to the home theatre via 802.11g/b technology (up to 54 Mbps).

At the back of this slim, silver digital media adapter are a handful of audio and video output options: composite ("RCA"), component, S-Video and optical audio.

If your high-speed modem is in the same room as your TV, or if you don't own a wireless router, you may choose to connect this product with the optional wired LAN jack.

Traveling to Europe for the summer? No problem - a switch at the back of the unit allows you to toggle between PAL or NTSC settings.

HP Digital Entertainment Center

In a category of its own, the HP Digital Entertainment Center (www.hpshopping.ca), or DEC for short, is basically a computer for your TV. It's a fully-functional PC with wireless mouse and keyboard that was designed to not only bring computing to the family room - the Web, email, games and popular software such as Outlook, Excel and Word - but also to enable users to get more out of their television programming and stored media with the bundled TV remote, including images, home movies and digital music.

This sleek black machine (model z557; \$4121) connects to a TV (or projector) using either RCA jacks, component video, S-Video, VGA or DVI (the latter of which is a popular choice among HDTV owners). Home theatre enthusiasts can connect the DEC to a receiver/amplifier for a surround sound experience.

The DEC features the intuitive Microsoft Windows Media Center Edition 2005 operating system for enhanced organization and navigation, and has a whopping

300GB hard drive, DVD player, dual-layer DVD burner, FM radio, optional Media Bay for more hard drive storage, and front-panel 9-in-1 memory card reader. The DEC's hard drive can also be used as a personal video recorder (PVR), therefore users can record and pause live TV, set a timer like a VCR with the onscreen Electronic Program Guide (EPG), and store hundreds of hours of content to be called upon at any time.

Built-in wireless connectivity (802.11g) means the DEC can also join an existing, compatible wireless network for high-speed Internet access, which also means you can stream your media from another PC altogether.

By Marc Saltzman

Questions and comments relating to the home entertainment section, including Marc Saltzman's monthly column, can be sent to homeentertainment@ppublishing.ca.

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Moving to Mac: The Basics

If you've decided that you're going to make the jump from Windows to Macintosh, once you finally power up your new Mac, you may run through a series of stages that go something like this:

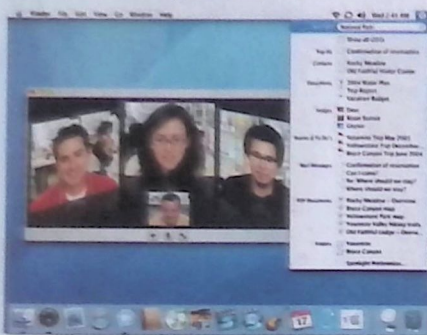
Stage One: "Oh no, I'm worried that I won't be able to figure this out!"

Stage Two: "Hey, even though this looks a bit different, there are a lot of similarities here."

Stage Three: "Oh no, wait! Some of these things don't do what I expect them to do!"

Stage Four: "Heeeelllp!"

In the end, it's Stage Two you should trust. Yes, there are quite a number of differences between Windows and Mac, and things won't always work the way you expect right off the bat, but in the end there are a lot of similarities than you'd think.



My Computer = The Finder

When you're running Windows, you can find almost anything you want by opening up My Computer. When you first open it, the drives (including hard drives, removable drives and CD/DVD drives) are on the right-hand pane, and the bar running down the left-hand side gives you options for finding your documents and network locations. On the Mac, when you open a new Finder window, it's reversed: the drives appear at the top of the left-hand bar, while one-touch access to documents and applications folders appear on

the lower left, and the larger right-hand pane shows you what's in the location you selected on the left-hand side.

C:\ = Macintosh HD

If you're a long-time Windows user, the concept of the C:\ drive has been drilled into your head for so long that it actually means something. Well, unlearn it when you move over to the Mac, because C:\ is just a pointer. With the Mac, your default drive is referred to as Macintosh HD, but you can rename it to anything you want. Likewise, your CD/DVD drive and removable flash drives won't have letter-based aliases, but will show up your Mac desktop with their own names. If you regularly use removable flash drives or external hard drives, it's a good idea to give

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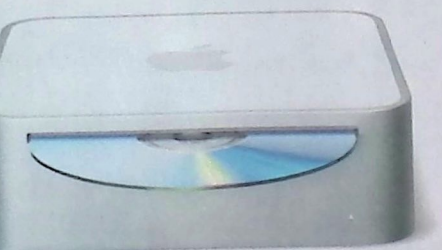
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like iTunes, and Safari. You'll rarely need to use the Apple menu apart from the "shut down" option, though it does have a handy "recent items" option for accessing recently-used documents and applications.

Control Panel = System Preferences

If you want to change how something works on your system – display, audio, your Internet connection – almost everything you need is found under System Preferences on the Mac. For more advanced diagnostics and configurations, there are some tools in the Applications folder, inside the Utilities subfolder.

DOS window = Terminal window

If you're the type of user who likes to tinker under the hood, you can do that with Mac OS X, too. With Windows, you click Start->Run and then type "command" or "cmd". With the Mac, you locate the window by going to the Applications folder, then the Utilities subfolder and clicking on Terminal.app. (If you use it regularly, why not drag the Terminal icon into your dock?) Just remember though: when you play around in Terminal, you're not playing with DOS, you're playing with a variant on UNIX.

By Sean Carruthers

them distinct names so you can spot them easily on the Mac desktop or in the Finder.

Start menu = Apple menu + The Dock

Ever since the introduction of Windows 95, it's been second nature to want to start most new actions at the Start menu; all of the applications are there, as well as all of the system controls. Since Mac OS X, it's been all about the Dock, which features one-click application-launch icons, the trash can, and the System Preferences control panel. The nice thing about the Dock is that it's easily user-customizable. If you want to add an application to it, just locate it in the Finder's Applications option, then drag the icon to the dock. Changed your mind? Just grab the icon from the dock and drag it to the desktop, where it will disappear in a cloud of smoke. You can even delete items that came pre-installed in the Dock,

Handy-dandy Mac tip

From reader Rico Ebron: If you're running OS X Tiger, you can highlight a word and hit Command-Control-D to get an instant dictionary definition if you're inside a Cocoa-based application like Safari or Mail.

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Canon projectors

Focusing on offices and schools, Canon Canada recently announced the latest additions to its line of projectors.


The LV-7245, LV-7240 and LV-X5 LCD projectors all feature XGA (1024x768) image display and 2500, 2100 and 1500 ANSI lumens respectively, and have a short throw distance, allowing for a 254 centimetre image projected from three metres away.

Canon's latest projectors feature projection surface colour correction, allowing for clearer projection onto surfaces other than white. Settings like blackboard, light yellow, light green and others correct the image for more accurate display on coloured projection surfaces.

Inputs for two laptops via separate VGA terminals as well as composite, S-Video and component with an optional cable allow the projectors to connect to a variety of home theatre and other devices.

All of the projectors integrate with Canon's recently unveiled RE-455X Visualizer, an XGA resolution document camera for quick image capture

and, when used in concert with a Canon or other projector, display of documents and 3D objects.

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Online diaries

Best of the blogging portals

Millions of Internet users pour their hearts and souls into online diaries, whether out of an egomaniacal desire for a public forum in which to vent their innermost thoughts or just wanting an easy way to keep friends updated about their lives. (Some blog for even more mundane reasons, like the fact that it's easier to type than to write things out longhand.)

Just as users have different expectations for their blogs, each blogging site has a unique vibe and set of features to offer. Below are four of the Web's most popular places to set up a blog.

Blogger

www.blogspot.com

Pros:

- Free image hosting up to 300MB
- Free posting by phone
- Supports multiblogs (one blog, multiple posters)

Cons:

- No friends lists or communities
- Not as much security customization

list can see them (in case your nosy mother suddenly becomes Web-savvy). You can even go so far as to make an entry visible to some on your friends list and not others – let the behind-the-back gossiping begin.

There are some interesting LJ-specific features like Mood icon sets, the ability to link directly to a friend's journal via username, and the "LJ-cut" that conceals a large portion of text behind a clickable phrase.

Upgrading the basic free account to a paid account for US\$25 per year nets you a few extra features like 100MB of on-site image hosting, the ability to "audioblog" (send in blog updates by phone), and more layout customization options. Nevertheless, users opting to remain with a free account should find most of their blogging needs met. The only thing that we chafed at with our free account was only being able to list five

you read their most recent posts in an amalgamated digest format. There's also a rather sophisticated layering of security features that lets you make certain more sensitive blog entries private, or flag certain entries as "Friends-only" so that only those on your Friends

Livejournal

www.livejournal.com

Pros:

- No ads
- Customize moods for each entry
- LJ-specific html

Cons:

- Some services restricted to paying members
- Blogroll restricted to five links for non-paying members

Livejournal

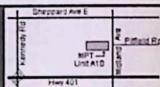
Livejournal is a popular and established blogging site, boasting more than eight million users worldwide. Its infrastructure is well-suited to personal blogging and creating social networks. You can easily keep tabs on friends by adding their blogs to a "Friends list" that lets

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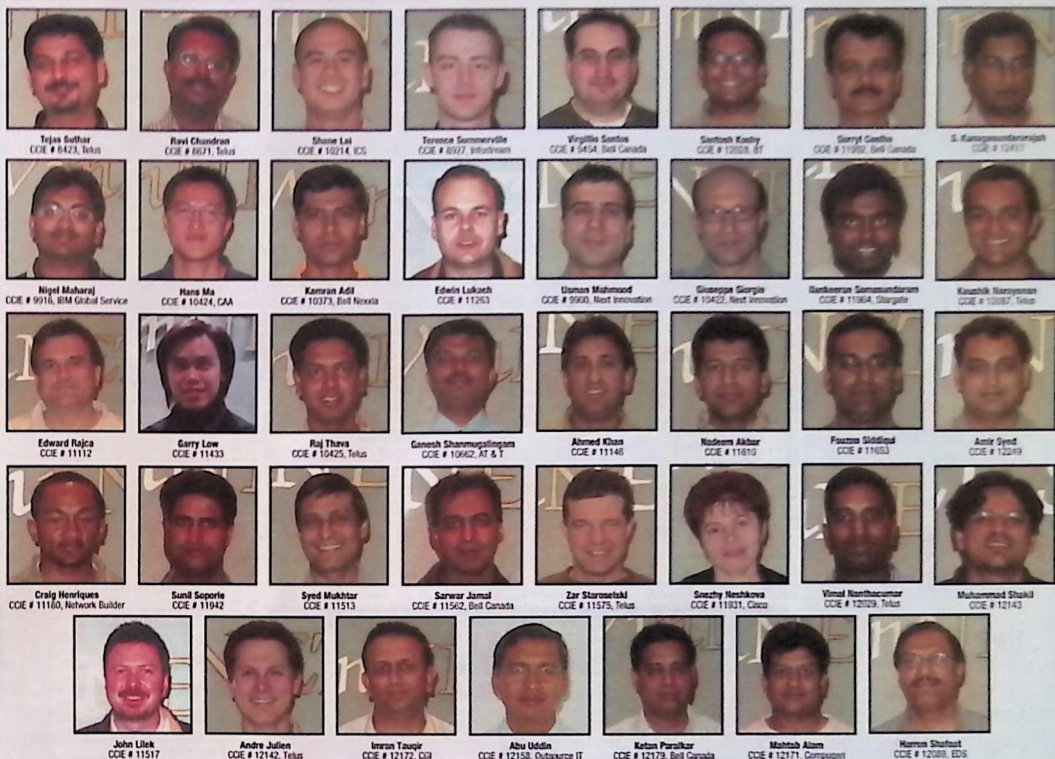
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Xanga

www.xanga.com

Pros:

- Multitude of downloadable "skins" to customize layout
- Referral and affiliate programs allow you to theoretically make a few bucks with your blog
- Comments log

Cons:

- No blogroll
- Corporate (Amazon, banner ads)

These are certainly powerful tools if you're comfortable enough with the technology that you're able to take full advantage of them. Less tech-savvy users, however, may find Blogger intimidating for the very reason that it is so powerful, and it's not as user-friendly or "plug and play" as other blogging sites.

By opting not to offer some of the more kitschy blogging features like looped background music, mood icons, and user icons integrated into the text of each entry, Blogger puts off a more mature vibe and is not surprisingly host to a lot of very interesting and literate blogs.

MySpace

www.myspace.com

Pros:

- Extensive text editor for entries

Cons:

- Minimal security guards in place
- Banner ads
- Only one default template

URLs on our links sidebar. (This is upgraded to 30 with a paid account.)

Blogger

The folks at Blogger really seem to be on the ball when it comes to incorporating the latest cutting-edge technologies and services into the company's blogging community. RSS feeds, posting via phone or email, 300MB of image storage, the ability to upload images from Flickr, and the integration of the Google AdSense program are just a few examples of the services that blogspot bloggers can take advantage of – all offered absolutely free.

Some users might be bothered by the lack of a Friends list and the inability to make certain entries private or tailored for certain eyes only, but the list of features offered for free is truly incredible.

Xanga

Xanga definitely caters to the teen and "tween" crowd judging by the overabundance of Xanga blogs we found containing incomprehensible "1337-speak" entries in pink and yellow fonts, tacky layouts peppered with too many photos, and [horrors!] music tracks looping in the background. (Something that neither LiveJournal nor Blogspot offer – thankfully, one might argue.)

Still, in spite of the childish vibe, Xanga offers a few neat features that aren't found elsewhere. One is a log that keeps track of all the comments you've left in other peoples' journals, in case you ever wanted to go back and read them for posterity. There's also a guestbook and a section for publishing your very own media reviews.

Some of Xanga's other features are questionable, such as the silly "eprops" feature, the banner ad that appears at the top of the blog, and a method of displaying what

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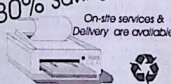
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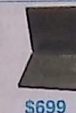
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MySpace

Aiming to be much more than a blog, MySpace ideally serves as a personal portal for networking (both business and social), keeping track of friends and even pursuing romantic relationships. The blog is just one

part of the overall package, and in fact, many don't even use it.


As such, the blogging service isn't all that sophisticated and doesn't offer most of the advanced features that savvy bloggers might want (for example, on-site photo storage, a links sidebar, and private posts.)

MySpace has the same Amazon affiliation as Xanga, (with the same reservations already mentioned), and a mood indicator apparently lifted from Livejournal, though without the ability to download customized mood icon sets.

All in all, MySpace offers a more restricted blogging service than the other sites we investigated, but depending on your intentions, the site's extraneous features might be enough to fill the deficit.

By Erin Bell

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HUB's picks for killing time online

Keep your anonymous surfing proxy server running and your hand at the ready over the Windows key + D in case you need to quickly minimize to the desktop: The following are HUB's picks for the best of the Internet time wasters.



From hidden games within Excel to the "Boss Mode" button in early Sierra quest games, humankind has always endeavoured to get money for nothing. Short of taking a nap at work (if you can figure out how to do that with

indemnity, please let us know), and with a computer on every work desk, there are a wealth of sites out there that can kill a particularly slow afternoon at the office.

Ebaum's World (www.ebaumsworld.com)

Have you ever wondered where all those emails with the subject line "FWD: FWD: FWD: FWD: RE: FWD: Funny video!!!!!!11" or similar originate? There's a good chance the person wasting his or her time and yours at

work has Ebaum's World bookmarked.

With more flash animations and games than most users will likely ever get through, funny videos, text jokes, sound boards (for prank calls or just general levity around the office) and a whole host of other ways to while away the time between lunch and the afternoon coffee break, the site is worth a look. While it's not too over the top, keep your pop-up blockers running for this one.

Special mention given to: Interactive Buddy.

Home Star Runner (www.homestarrunner.com)

If you haven't heard of Strong Bad, Home Star Runner, The Cheat et al., you owe it to yourself to grab a heaping helping of this cult turned pop-culture phenomenon. Once you're well-versed in these clever Flash shorts, games and downloads, you may finally have something in common with the guy in your office that is constantly singing about Trogdor and saying "holly crap," or "scroll-a-matones" ... assuming you want to have anything in common with that guy.

Essentially, a series of online cartoons and games that will keep you clicking for hours, this is one site that may even warrant staying late after regular work hours have already been wasted away. Bonus: if the boss doesn't actually see the screen, you can look like a real go-getter come 8:00 pm.

Special mention given to: Strong Bad Emails.



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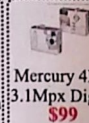
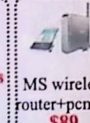
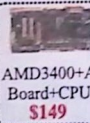
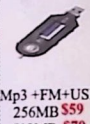
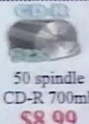
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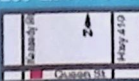
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Broken down with links for the "Seven Deadly Sins," with an extra category for miscellaneous, Not Proud is like a virtual confessional without the Priest ... or perhaps the spiritual release.

Site visitors confess their deepest, darkest secrets and shames that vary from silly to sad, from dreary to debauched. It's not for the faint of heart.

This site can steal an entire afternoon or just fill in a short gap between projects. If you're feeling bold, submit your own anonymous confession.

If nothing else, browsing the site can make us feel more comfortable with our own idiosyncrasies and shames.

Special mention given to: The "Random" button.

Internet Archive (www.archive.org)

Placing this site under the heading of Internet time wasters is unfair; the Internet Archive is a non-profit organization whose mission is to build the quintessential Internet library.

In among all the heady talk of access to information and our "right to remember," users can find a wealth of varying hilarious and eye-opening videos, free for the download in streaming, compressed MPEG-4 and MPEG-2 – perfect for compiling thematic DVDs of the best.

Videos run the gamut from recently-gathered amateur video of news events to old "public service" reels to hopelessly dated advertisements

for Newport menthol cigarettes and just about everything in between.

Extensive galleries of audio recordings and an ongoing project to digitize and make available written works that have passed into the public domain make the Internet Archive a great place to browse and download amusing and eye-opening videos and an excellent resource for free access to information.

Everything from machinima to vintage cartoons, Grateful Dead recordings to presidential addresses, European history to Aesop's Fables and a wealth of archived computer software is free for the browsing.

Special mention given to: The Prelinger Archives (www.archive.org/details/prelinger).

The Onion (www.theonion.com)

The Onion is the predominant satirical news site. It applies its glib and sarcastic style to the news of the day, often fabricating stories entirely. It's a good way to start your day off with a smile. Even the most hard-nosed of managers has to appreciate that a happy worker is an effective worker, right?

It's good for a laugh and often contains biting social commentary – whether subtle or as subtle as a brick wall.

The content is a bit hit-or-miss, and some mornings it seems the same sardonic formula from yesterday's update is applied to today's. Still, in among the regular news site surfing, The Onion can help keep the days events in perspective.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin



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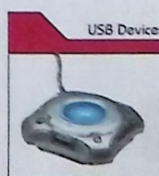
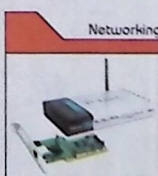
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What I Did on My Summer Vacation

Ah, summer! The perfect time for a two-week camping trip by the ocean, requiring a 20-hour car trip with two kids! Surely the right technology could prevent endless in-car arguments, plus keep me connected to my email and favourite Web sites while I bask on the treeless sands of North Carolina's Outer Banks?

Lucky for me, the answer to my question was a resounding "Yes!"

Loaded with the right technology, my wife and I were able to do everything listed above, plus stay cool as our in-car navigation system repeatedly rescued us from being lost in Portsmouth, Virginia.

Getting There

A pleasant road trip starts with the right car. In our case, it was a 2005 Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited, an air-conditioned SUV powerful enough to tow a large pop-up tent trailer, coast across deep sand using four-wheel drive, and keep the kids quiet with a built-in DVD player with overhead LCD screen, remote control, and two wireless headsets. I cannot stress the importance of an in-car DVD system for making long road trips with kids quiet and bearable!

Up in the front seat, it was the Jeep's GPS-monitoring navigation system that kept us on track. Equipped with a large colour LCD screen built into the centre dash, the navigation system allows you to plot a course by entering in the destination street address and city, and track your vehicle's location and direction on a dynamic "moving map" while providing on-screen and voice-generated directions on where and when to turn. This last feature was a godsend on those times when we went off course in Portsmouth due to road work: The navigation computer guided us patiently through a series of tortuous twists and turns, getting us free of a rundown urban area that can charitably be described as "bleak."

Backing up the Jeep's system was Microsoft Streets & Trips 2005



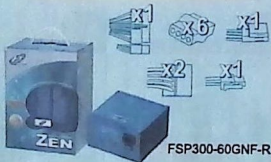
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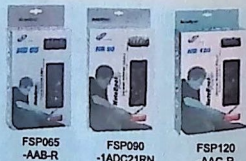
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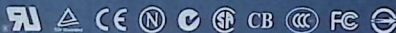
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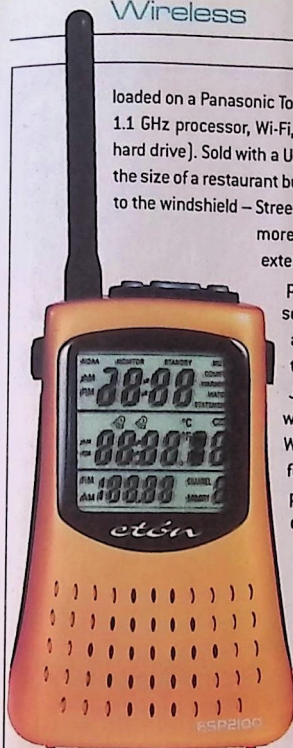
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loaded on a Panasonic Toughbook CF-W2 laptop (Pentium M 1.1 GHz processor, Wi-Fi, 12.1-inch LCD monitor, and 40GB hard drive). Sold with a USB-connected GPS radio receiver – the size of a restaurant butter pat, the receiver suction-cups to the windshield – Streets & Trips provided

more detailed map information. Its extensive database also allowed us to pre-plan restaurant, gas, and sight-seeing stops, calculate travel times and detailed turn-by-turn directions, and take over from the Jeep's navigation system when we wanted to take a different road. When this happened, the Jeep's female voice would tell us in a polite but firm tone that we were off-course. If we persisted, the car's computer eventually relented and recalculated its on-screen route to compensate for our deviations.

Setting Up a Home

Our destination was the KOA [Kampgrounds of America]

Cape Hatteras campsite on the Outer Banks. A thin sand bar off North America's east coast, the Outer Banks were the continent's original shoreline 10,000 years ago, before glacial melting raised ocean levels by 400 feet. As the meeting place between the cold North Atlantic and warm Gulf Stream currents, the Outer Banks are home to a range of water temperatures (mainly warm) and great surf. As well, the stiff winds blowing across the ever-shifting sandbars made for fabulous kite-flying, and explain why the Wright Brothers chose this site for their first flight in 1903.

The KOA campground had water/electrical hookups at each campsite. For us, this was key to a comfortable camping adventure, because we were using a Jayco Select pop-up tent trailer. The Jayco Select is to a regular tent as our Grand Cherokee is to a tricycle; unbelievably well-equipped and comfortable.

Not only did our Jayco Select tent trailer come with two slide-out tented beds (one queen and one king) and a kitchen dinette that "pops out" to provide more space, but it had a three-burner gas stove and oven, a electric/propane refrigerator, microwave oven, double sink with hot and cold running water (thanks to the Select's propane water heater), built-in lighting and sound system, indoor/outdoor shower set and toilet, and a powerful rooftop air conditioner. Given that we were parked on a treeless sandbank where daytime temperatures routinely exceeded 45 degrees Celsius, air conditioning was a must. I am amazed to say that our tent trailer stayed cool no matter how hot it got outside, and believe me, it got extremely hot!

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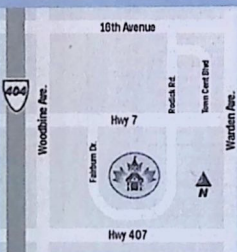
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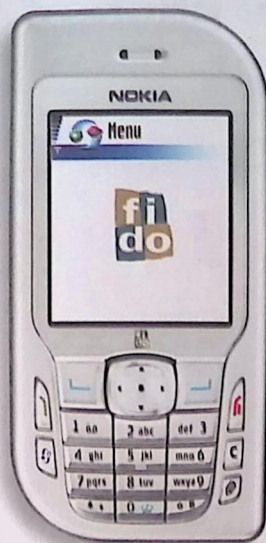
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Besides providing living space, the Jayco Select was home to our portable communications system. This consisted of an HP Pavilion DV1240VA laptop PC (Intel Pentium M 735 chip, 14-inch wide-format LCD screen, and 100GB hard drive) equipped with a Sierra Wireless AirCard 775. The Aircard allowed us to connect directly to the Web via the nearest EDGE/GSM/GPRS cellular network. However, sometimes our laptop's WiFi transmitter logged itself onto someone's unprotected wireless network; apparently out of a desire to surf at broadband speeds.

To help manage our email, we used the new WordPerfect MAIL program, which interfaces nicely with WordPerfect Office 12. It provided a lot of email management tools, while staying under the radar of viruses aimed at Microsoft Outlook.

Supplementing all of this capability was my trusty Rogers Wireless BlackBerry 6280: It did triple duty as a cellular phone, email device, and wireless Web browser. For additional connectivity, I took along a Rogers' Nokia 6620 cell phone with digital camera and MP3 playback; a Fido Nokia 6670 handset which matches the 6620's capabilities and adds a 4X zoom lens; and a Rogers' Nokia 6820 with digital camera and full QWERTY keyboard. One can never be too connected, after all.

Day-to-Day Technology

Out on the beach, we relied on a number of cameras to capture the moment. For still images, my wife had her beloved Olympus C-8080 eight megapixel camera with SLR-style features. Meanwhile, we shot video on MiniDV tape using a Panasonic PV-GS150, and on DVD using a Sony Handycam DCR-DVD 403. Both are palm-sized camcorders with flip-out LCD colour monitors, and both performed well.

With a range of up to 19 kilometres, our Motorola SX-700R FRS Talkabout walkie-talkies kept us in touch with the kids as they wandered the beach. And for safety's sake, the Eton ESP2100 Weather Alert radio kept an automated ear to the local weather channel for storm warnings. When you're vacationing in Hurricane Alley, weather news is vital. After all, hurricanes washed away part of the Outer Banks a few years ago, which may explain why the Men's washroom at the KOA campground includes a TV permanently tuned to The Weather Channel.

By James Careless

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Hit the Road with ... your home phone?

There's been a lot of talk over the last few years that home phone service is slowly but surely headed for the dustbin of history, thanks to the proliferation of cellular handsets. After all, why pay a huge monthly fee just to have something that stays in one place for the entire month, especially if you're constantly on the go?

Because of the limitations of a home phone line, many people have decided to make the switch to Voice over Internet Protocol, better known as VoIP. Instead of paying for a physical connection to the phone system, you pay for a service that works anywhere you can hook up your handset. What that means is that you can take your VoIP equipment to a friend's house, to the office, or across the country, and so long as you're able to plug it into a live broadband Internet connection, you'll still be able to make and receive phone calls as if you were at home.

I recently got the opportunity to have a sneak peek at the next wave of VoIP technology: wireless VoIP. Vonage (www.vonage.ca), which offers VoIP service to subscribers all around North America, is now test-driving new handsets that offer VoIP service over WiFi connections. Now, not only don't you have to be constrained by your physical location, but you don't even need to be able to find an Ethernet jack: all you need is a wireless hotspot.

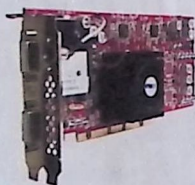
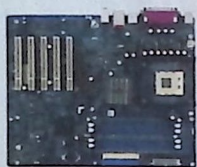
The handset itself, made by UTStarcom (www.utstar.com), is about the same size and shape as a cellular handset, making it a very familiar design that can easily be slipped into a pocket. Rather than connecting to the cellular network, however, it is designed to work with any WiFi

network; when you want to use your phone from a new location, you simply scan for available WiFi access points and connect to them, just as you would with a notebook computer. And as with a notebook, the UTStarcom handset can even connect to a WiFi access point that's been secured with an encryption key, provided you know the key.



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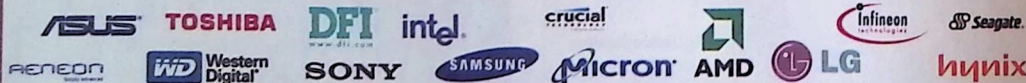
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The main difference is that the handset only has a small screen, and – as yet – does not have the ability to get past validation Web pages that are required to use many public hotspots. In other words, if you have to watch an ad first before you can access the hotspot, you're out of luck. If you have to click on a checkbox accepting the terms of usage, too bad. If you have to log in using a username and password, you can't do it. Not yet, anyhow. (Perhaps it's just as well, as it'll stop people from treating the local coffee shop as an extension of their living room. There are some conversations we just don't need to hear in public.)

I managed to get some hands-on time with the handset, and for the most part it worked well. Before scanning for my local wireless access point, I noticed a list of WiFi networks the handset had used for previous connections, to which it could automatically reconnect; for people who travel between a few regular locations, getting connected should be a breeze.

The initial connection to my encrypted network took a bit of work, as I had to manually enter the WEP key via the handset's keypad, but afterwards, it was stored in the handset and ready to connect at a moment's notice. Once connected, the handset worked just fine, and audio quality was good.

If I have to list a complaint about the handset, it's that it looks hopelessly old-fashioned next to today's ultra-compact, multimedia-ready cellular handsets. This one uses a monochrome screen with a piddly orange backlight. As more cell phones move to the more compact

clamshell form factor, the candybar-shaped UTStarcom phone looks more like recent history than the near future.

No doubt this will all change with forthcoming models, with colour screens, better designs, and the ability to hook the phone up to public hotspots using a mini-browser. For now, it's a nifty new way to take your "home" phone number with you wherever you go, without paying telco premiums to do so.

Vonage's WiFi-enabled handsets will be available late in 2005 or early 2006.

By Sean Carruthers

Questions and comments relating to the wireless section, including Sean Carruthers' monthly column, can be sent to wireless@ppublishing.ca.

The Watch List: Video Podcasting

A couple of milestones for Apple's iTunes: First, the iTunes store has hit half a billion songs downloaded worldwide through its iTunes online store. Secondly, with the introduction of iTunes 4.9 software, podcasts are supported both in the software and the online store. What's interesting to note is the inclusion of a few video podcasts in the line-up at the iTunes store, fueling speculation that the video iPod may be just around the corner.

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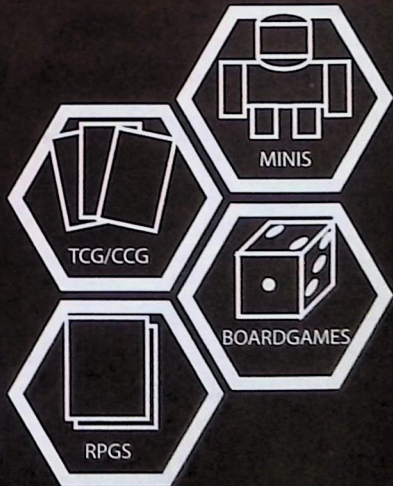
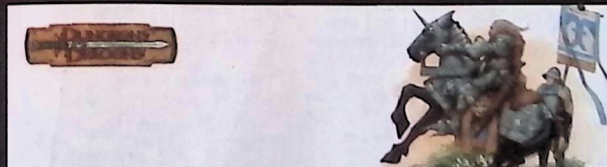
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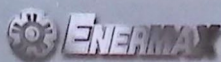
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Building the brains behind the brawn

Radical Entertainment's Senior AI Programmer Ben Geisler talks about his work on *Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, his role in the industry, and where he thinks videogames are headed.



Ben Geisler is a five-year veteran of the videogame industry. He worked as an AI [artificial intelligence] programmer on *X-Men Legends* and *Soldier of Fortune II* with Wisconsin-based Raven Software before moving to Vancouver and joining Radical Entertainment in March 2004.

His latest project, *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, is in stores now for Xbox and GameCube.



progress throughout the course of development is interesting because they can go from being really easy one day to really difficult the next day, and that's all because we're sitting in there adjusting

the difficulty levels, how much the AI is allowed to react to the player. We could just sit here and easily defeat the player whenever we wanted, but that's not the point. You want to make a balanced game. The end of the development is all about that. It's all about balance. Of course, you also have to make sure that the AI doesn't look stupid; some of these characters need to be able to catch up to Hulk.

HUB: As a senior AI programmer, are you involved all the way through the production cycle?

BG: Yeah. You usually want to get the lead AI guy and the lead animation guy in there early in production so that you can plan out the new AI systems you need for the game.

HUB: Was the AI in *Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* built up from scratch, or was it adapted from an existing model?

BG: Both, actually. *Hulk I* [2003, Vivendi Universal] was all about the struggle with Bruce Banner becoming the Hulk, and you actually played as Bruce Banner for a while. There were a lot of soldiers in it, and we kept most of that AI, except that to make *Hulk II* what it is, to make "ultimate destruction", we toned down the health on those guys so that they're pretty much just fodder. We added in a whole bunch of new enemy types, like the mechs that fight the Hulk - these big guys in mech suits - and the demons in his mind that he's fighting, and the Devil Hulk, and these are part of the new system.

So we kept the old soldiers, just basically as a development shortcut, and then created a new system for the more advanced stuff we wanted to do. We wanted more of a brawler feel to the more advanced characters, and for that reason we developed a system custom to that, so characters can do things like counters and anticipate what move Hulk is going to do next, and remember what moves Hulk has already tried.

HUB: What were some of the specific tasks that you were involved in?

BG: Most recently, with the push up to Gold Master candidate, we were basically at that stage where QA is playing through the game and finding bugs. Anything that involved AI, like gameplay scripting and anything that involved the character, we would look through bug lists and see where we could help. It's more of a polishing thing at that stage, so if we didn't have any crucial bugs that would prevent the game from running, then we'd just go through ourselves and play and see, "Oh wait, that guy over on top of that building, he's not shooting at me for some reason," and then we'd go and debug that and figure out why. And then there are things like boss fight balance. The way boss fights

HUB: That's probably the most common complaint we hear against AI, that it's too dumb.

BG: That is definitely true, except at the same time, if you make an AI that's too smart, then gamers are gonna complain that the AI's cheating or that the AI's too good or something.

HUB: It's such a delicate balance to maintain.

BG: It is, definitely. The producer of *Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, Tim Bennis, came up with these four posters during pre-production that showed the key elements we wanted: Unstoppable Movement, Epic Fighting, Total Freedom, and Smash Everything. We really focused on those four bullet points and made sure that whatever aspect of what we were doing should relate to that. So if I'm making AI, it shouldn't necessarily feel like you're playing *Rainbow Six* or something like that. It's not about enemies doing cunning things and dodging behind crates. It's more about the epic, grand scale of a superhero brawler.

Earlier in production, before it was fire-fighting mode and crunch mode, it was about creating the systems to support that. We figured out that we were going to need a heavy reliance on being able to react to Hulk's actions. Hulk has over a hundred moves in this game, and the AI needs to be able to know when each of those moves is being kicked off and react to it.

HUB: In the time that you've been in the industry, what changes have you seen?

BG: It seemed like there was a lot more PC development going on when I first entered the industry in early 2000. This current generation of consoles with Xbox and PS2 seems to really have taken off.



Manufacturers like Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft understand now that developers are important, and they're putting the time into making good tools, allowing us to cut our budgets down both in terms of time and in



terms of the amount of people we need to support development on those platforms. It just seems to be more developer-friendly.

The other thing is licenses. It's definitely true that there are a lot of

licensed games coming out. That's the big thing is licensed properties as everyone knows.

HUB: Certainly with Radical and The Simpsons and Hulk.

BG: Yeah. So it could be just my own personal bias, but I'm even saying that you know every other game you see advertised will be a licensed property, or a sequel of some sort.

HUB: It's less of a risk to take for sure.

BG: Right, it is. The publishers feel comfortable because they know that if you've got a fan of Harry Potter, the mom is going to go to the store, and she knows the kid likes Harry Potter so she'll pick up the game. She might not necessarily know if it's a good game or not, but there's definitely that element.

HUB: Do you think the trend of license-based games is good overall?

BG: Well, one thing I will say about it is that I'm an old-school gamer, I've been gaming forever, and in the past, licensed games have kind of sucked. I mean, like E.T. on my Atari 2600 was just awful.

HUB: You had that thing? That was legendary!

BG: That's kind of the worst case example. That's not really fair. But in general, hardcore gamers wouldn't get excited about those titles. I do think that's changing. That's why I'm glad to be a part of Radical, because I think we're part of changing it. Our first Hulk game did pretty well, and with Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, at least from the reviews I've seen, everyone's been loving it. I mean, you're still going to have some [licensed games] that just aren't very fun, but I hope that if we're going to continue doing licensed products, we at least invest the time in getting them right instead of just sort of relying on, as I said, the mom

to just go there and buy it.

HUB: How much time do you actually get to spend playing other people's games?

BG: It depends. For Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, I spent a lot of time on games that were closely related to that. I played a lot of Devil May Cry, and then God of War came out, which was awesome, but it was really too late to influence some of our development. We work pretty crazy hours, and I'm a family man so my time is precious, but I've tailored my gaming now to what I'm currently interested in making. I played Power Stone [1999, Capcom] quite a bit, because that has a lot of good boss fight material for Hulk: Ultimate Destruction.

HUB: What do you like and dislike about working in the industry?

BG: I think that the best thing about working in the industry is that there's so much reward for what you do — once you get a game out there on the shelf and you get fans and people make Web sites about it and people are talking about how cool it is. I remember as a kid just loving games, and now I get to share that.

Games are starting to get the respect they deserve in terms of a true art form. I think it took the fact that we finally make more than the film industry to make people see that this can be an art form in of itself, and it has been really cool to be part of that sort of change. I'm part of the mainstream gaming industry, but you've also got all these independent game developers that are trying to play with experimental gameplay. It's kind of like film, where you've got mainstream film and then you've got indie film, and that's cool.

What I don't like about it is that it's still a really young industry and there are some things that we can probably do better in terms of time management. Radical is great for long hours, and the management on Hulk: Ultimate Destruction was awesome at figuring out what we need to do without sort of killing you. Some companies deal with that really well. I think Radical does. But that's just one thing about the industry that I haven't liked in the past. I'm glad to now be at a company that knows how to deal with it.

HUB: Well, we don't want to keep you too long. Thanks a lot for taking time out.

BG: No problem.

By Erin Bell

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Fullmetal Alchemist 2: curse of the Crimson Elixir

Publisher: Square Enix Developer: Racjin Platform: PlayStation 2

Like so many licensed games before it, enjoying Fullmetal Alchemist 2 depends on whether you're a fan of the animated TV show upon which it's based. The good news is that Fullmetal Alchemist happens to be a very good anime.

It's highly recommended to watch the included TV episodes before playing if you aren't already familiar with the series. Chances are, you'll find the characters and story compelling enough to be willing to sit through the game's largely indifferent action-RPG gameplay.

The story follows brothers Edward and Alphonse Elric, two young students of alchemy who were involved in an accident that left Edward

with two artificial metal limbs (hence the name Fullmetal) and Alphonse without a body altogether, his soul fused to a gigantic suit of armor.

Curse of the Crimson Elixir continues the brothers' journey as they search for the Philosopher's Stone, an artifact with enough power to

restore their bodies to their original forms.

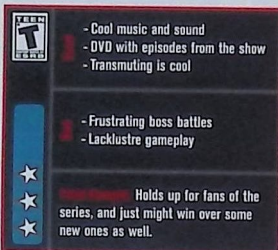
Players take control of Edward, who besides his repertoire of brawling moves can also use alchemy to transmute mundane objects into various cool weapons.



The hulking Alphonse trails behind as a sidekick. He's largely computer-controlled, but is strong and smart enough to hold his own in combat. Edward's transmutations are the coolest part of the game, which is otherwise pretty standard action-RPG fare, relatively short and easy to complete with uneven boss battles.

The in-game dialogue can be tedious (despite using the excellent voice actors from the series) because it advances slowly by way of repeated button presses. However, the anime-style cutscenes are welcome, and the game is presented in a pseudo cell-shaded look that gives the impression that the characters are being plucked straight from the show.

By Erin Bell



Killer 7

Publisher / Developer: Capcom Platforms: PlayStation 2, GameCube

For evidence that videogames are maturing as an art form, you need look no further than Killer 7. Where many of today's games rated "M for Mature" are actually anything but — containing an overabundance of exaggerated violence, naughty words and puerile sexuality — Killer 7 tackles some pretty heady subject matter in ways that are both disturbing and beautiful at the same time.

Make no mistake, Killer 7 has sex, violence and vulgar language in spades. But the difference is in the execution. Where notoriously "Mature" games like Mortal Kombat and Grand Theft Auto are full of sensational violence, the violence in Killer 7 is stylish. When enemies are dispatched, they spurt red ribbons of blood or explode in thousands of tiny dots. The esthetic backdrop is stylized and surreal as though you were navigating through an interactive manga.

Even the premise is gloriously messed up. A sort of post-apocalyptic Earth is threatened by a strange scourge of monsters known as the

Heaven Smile. Hired to fight them is a syndicate of seven assassins known as the Killer 7, who in actual fact are all different personalities of the leader of the syndicate, Harman Smith.

The seven personas have distinct weapons,



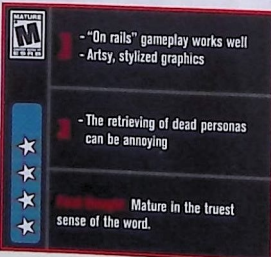
characteristics, and special skills that must be used in certain situations. For example, the nimble Coyote Smith can pick locks, while former wrestler Mask de Smith can bash down barriers.

While there are many unique things about Killer 7, one of the most significant is the movement system. Killer 7 is quite possibly the first and only action game on rails. Press the A button and the character will advance along a pre-determined path. Press B and he or she will turn around. A flick of the analog stick decides which direction to take when the available path forks. This is awkward for about two minutes, then, rather surprisingly, becomes second nature. While some might argue that this cuts down on the player's freedom immensely, it also makes for a streamlined and concise adventure that eliminates pointless red herring exploration.

When a persona dies, it falls to the "cleaner" persona, Garcian Smith, to retrieve the body. This was the only thing that proved a bit tiresome in the otherwise perfect pacing.

Anyone who buys into the "games as art" philosophy owes it to themselves to experience Killer 7.

By Erin Bell



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Nanostray

Publisher: Majesco Developer: Shin'en Platform: Nintendo DS

Gamers longing to relive their glory days, impressing others in the arcade with their mad R-Type skills, will want to give Nanostray a closer look. You're already used to blasting everything in sight for no better reason than that it's there and your ship is equipped with an array of lasers, bombs and projectile weapons with which to do so.

Nanostray draws heavily from R-Type and other such vertically scrolling shooters from the arcades of yesteryear. It improves in some ways – user-selectable weapons, better graphics, richer sound among others – but fails to quite match its inspirations in gameplay.

Players pilot a ship through standard vertical shooter locales – forest, ocean, futuristic metropolis, lava flows – in eight levels, sadly with little sense of purpose. There isn't even the most cursory of mentions as to why exactly we're supposed to be piloting this ship and blowing up everything in sight, and while story isn't exactly the thing that draws players to games such as Nanostray, the whole affair seems rather pointless

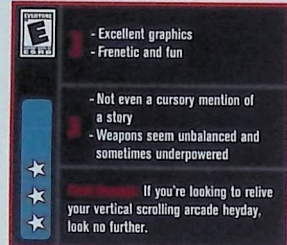


when we aren't even given "the aliens stole your military plans, your girl, your milk money" or similar.

The lower touch screen of the DS is incorporated into the gameplay somewhat, displaying a radar screen and allowing gamers to select from four weapons.

Weapons span the standard fare machine gun-style lasers and lightning beams as well as a beam weapon that shoots horizontally out of either side of the ship, and that has its uses at certain points in the game. The concept of switching weapons using the touch screen is a neat one, but gamers that are distracted from the top screen action for even a moment will find themselves obliterated in short order.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin



Golden Eye: Rogue Agent

Publisher / Developer: Electronic Arts Platform: Nintendo DS

A handheld rehash of a mediocre console shooter. Can't be all bad, right? Actually, yes, that is right. And in many ways, the handheld version of Rogue Agent actually bests its console brethren.

Perhaps it's because we can forgive Rogue Agent for many of the same transgressions that appeared in the console versions given that the DS's current FPS library is so bleak.

It's a shame too, given that the Metroid Prime Hunters DS demo cartridge has shown the DS as the perfect handheld for FPS gameplay thanks to its lower touch screen and stylus / thumbpad pseudo-mouse / analog (respectively) control.

There's not a lot to the single player game; running through various Bond-esque locales, shooting various Bond-esque baddies with the occasional boss battle and sort of gameplay puzzle thrown in for good measure. However, on the DS it comes across quite well.



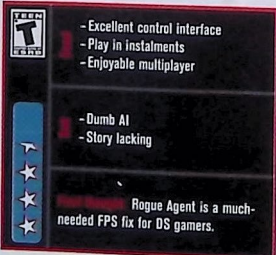
A multiplayer mode adds value to the proposition and is similar to the classic Golden Eye on the Nintendo 64. The multiplayer maps can also be played with computer-controlled bots, but that's nowhere near as much fun as having a human opponent to play against.

For best results, you'll need seven friends sporting a DS and – to get access to all maps – a copy of the game. Up to eight gamers can play together on a limited number of multiplayer maps with only one cartridge, however.

The music is a major failing point, filled with blips and bleeps more at home in a 1970's arcade than a current generation game. Load up your MP3 player before sitting down for a session with Rogue Agent.

Powers stemming from the game's namesake prosthetic eye that appeared in the console iterations are present and accounted for and do help to add a little extra interest to what is otherwise a decidedly middle-of-the-road FPS.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin



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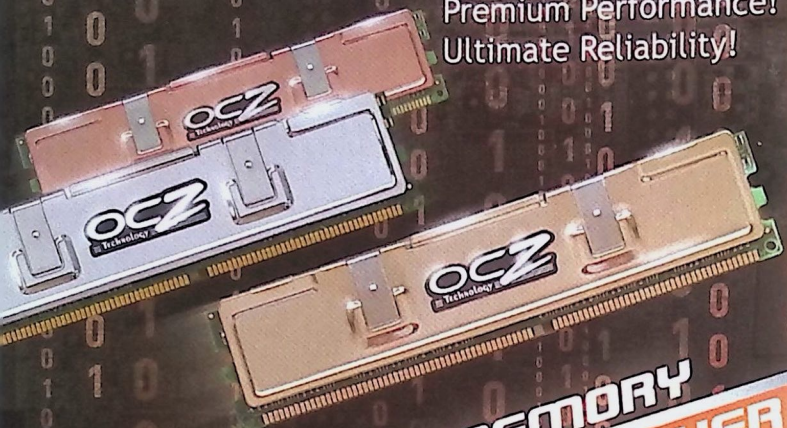
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